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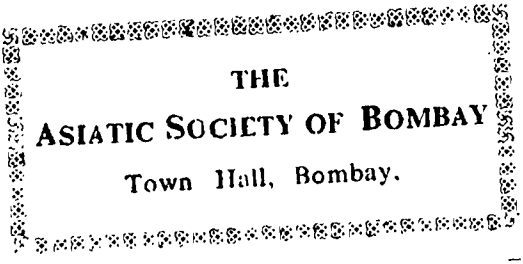

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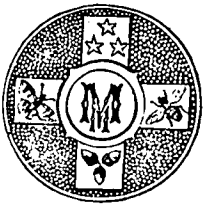

SERMONS

PREACHED IN RUGBY SCHOOL CHAPEL,

IN

1858, 1859, 1860.

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BY THE REV.

FREDERICK TEMPLE, D.D.

Chaplain in Ordinary to Her Majesty,
Head Master of Rugby School,
Chaplain to the Right Hon. the Earl of Denbigh.

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It would be natural when sending a Volume of Sermons to the Press to correct blemishes of style, to supply omitted links of argument, and to make any other alterations which a careful perusal had suggested. But I have thought it better for various reasons not to do so in this instance. These Sermons are printed exactly as they were preached.

F. T.

TO THE BOYS OF RUGBY SCHOOL

AND TO THEIR PARENTS

THIS VOLUME IS AFFECTIONATELY INSCRIBED

BY ONE

WHO WOULD GLADLY SACRIFICE EVERY OTHER AIM,

IF, BY SO DOING, HE COULD HELP

ANY OF HIS PUPILS

TO LIVE IN THE SPIRIT OF THE BIBLE

AND

TO LOVE THE LORD JESUS CHRIST.

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SERMON I.

GOOD FRIDAY.

HOSEA xi. 4.

'I drew them with cords of a man, with bands of love.'

THIS is not a day for difficult doctrines but for the simplest and humblest feelings. The great work of this day is quite beyond the reach of our understanding. What it was that was done for us we are not able to comprehend, nor why it was needed to be done. There was much that was mysterious, but it is not the mystery that we find the chief topic in the account four times repeated of our Lord's last days and death. In very plain language the facts are minutely told. The doctrines we hardly see. The appeal is not made to our understanding, nor even directly to our conscience. With the cords of a man we are drawn. The human affections in which all men share, the feelings which even the poorest, the meanest, the most ignorant partake in, the pity, the tenderness, the love that can only be called

forth by love, these are now the cords by which our Father draws us, the cords of a man. Not our admiration for greatness, nor for energy of soul; not our reverence for wisdom, seeing into secret things, and forcing conviction on us as it speaks. We see not here that which makes our hearts applaud. We dare not here admire as we should an ordinary man. He whom we think of is above our admiration. If He is calm and dignified before a weak judge and an angry mob, yet His bearing has no proud consciousness that many eyes are on Him, and that He has a high part to play. All this is out of place. The dignity is the dignity of a simple purpose, of a mind too lost in other thoughts to have room for any thoughts of self. We can admire St. Paul before the Sanhedrim, or before the magistrates at Philippi. But here we cannot feel admiration. It is not a great man whose history we are reading. It is not greatness of soul, or commanding will; to call it noble-minded does not express our feeling. We cannot think of this history at all in the same way that we do of those tales of noble endurance which sometimes make our hearts beat quick. There are times in our Lord's life when we can find passages that seem like touches of what we call greatness, the indignation which denounced the woes on the wicked party that ever resisted God's work, or the sternness which reproved the ruler of the synagogue who forbad men to come and be healed. But here we find no trace of such feeling; not even of that anger which a man

might feel at treachery and falsehood. Here is not the will which compels men to bow down before it. His bearing is not the bearing of a strong man resolute in his purpose. His resolution is not of that kind which triumphs in opposition, and rejoices in victory. In all human greatness there is something like exultation in the strength that makes the greatness. But here we see nothing of this. Not to high feelings does it speak; not to the man who is conscious of a lofty purpose nobly followed; not to him who rests with complacency on the thoughts of his own success, or his own struggles for the right. If such thoughts are ever right, they cannot enter here. To the heart that loves like a child, to the sinner deeply laden with his burden of unhappiness, to the broken spirit that secretly longs to escape from fetters which it is powerless to break, to the soul that is ready to despair, yes, to the thief and murderer at the hour of public doom, this Gospel speaks, and tells of hope, and love, and eagerness to forgive, and embracing arms, and falling on the neck, and tears of joy, and the welcome of the Prodigal Son.

We cannot study here. We can but surrender our hearts to the love which is too much for them to contain. We have not to brace ourselves up with much and hard endeavour. We have not to clear our hearts of folly, and to prepare to receive hard sayings. We have not by much meditation to arrive at truths too deep for common understandings. We need no hard words, or

well-taught minds, or sharpened heads. The wretchedest sinner that ever longed for death to free him from his anguish, the most ignorant and darkened soul that can hardly understand human language, can here find what will speak to him, as his mother's caresses once did in his childhood, as nothing has ever spoken to him since. The soul that could never make the effort to aim at what was noble, the mind that could never take in a wider reach of thought than his own poor daily life, are here on a level with the wisest and the noblest. They too are drawn, as all are drawn, with the cords of a man, with the cords of human love by a loving Father. When all else has failed; when examples fail to rouse them, and precepts fail to guide them; when sin has proved too strong for reasoning, for the sight of the wretchedness it brings with it, for fear of hell hereafter, for bitter experience of hell here; when we have fought and been beaten, and at last have given up hope; when our hearts are grown too cold for words of eloquence to reach them; when we have settled down despairingly in sinful habits, still fretting inwardly at the horror that lies before us; even then the Cross of Christ may yet save us with its simple story; if we have strength for nothing else, we yet may have strength to fling ourselves at the foot of the Cross; to think not of the future but of the past; to live, not in resolutions of amendment, but in love of Christ; for He loved us and gave Himself to die for us.

We are sometimes cold and dead. There are times when our feelings towards God seem to lose their warmth. Perhaps we neglect our prayers: or perhaps we repeat them carelessly as a matter of form, even an irksome form. We wander to various thoughts and never fix our minds on God. We are not easy. We feel not quite happy. And we wonder at our own dryness and hardness. We wish for any state of mind rather than what we have. In the midst perhaps of outward activity our religious life seems listless and dull. We almost long to rush into open sin, fancying that the excitement of that will be better than our present lethargy. We are weary, and yet we know not the way to better things. We cannot resolve, and we procrastinate, and say to-morrow, or bye-and-bye. Or we try to turn our eyes another way and not to think about it. Sometimes, indeed most often, all is not right with us when things are so; we are doing something wrong, and we know it. Sometimes we are not conscious of anything like that; we only know that we feel nothing to draw us to God; we see reason enough for serious thoughts, but our hearts seem turned to summer dust, and we cannot love. We can obey and we do, but we feel like servants not like children, and we are unhappy because we cannot rouse any warmer feelings in ourselves.

And when this is so, where can we go but to the Cross of Christ? Can our hearts long resist the pleading of that story, or can we refuse to come when the Father

begins to draw us with the cords of a man, with bands of love?

Perhaps under a decent exterior we hide some sinful habit which has long been eating into our souls. It is possible that we may be discharging every duty as far as human eyes behold us. We may even have better thoughts at times, and offer up most earnest prayers. We may be most sincere in our wish to serve God, and may have striven long and hard to subdue what is evil in us. Perhaps it is a fault which leaves us entirely free sometimes, and gives us leisure to prepare our hearts against it. And yet time after time the temptation has proved too strong; or we have been found too weak. We have slipped back again we hardly can tell how; and sin reigns unopposed. Unclean thoughts return upon us and we indulge them; or it may be an unkind temper makes us harsh to those around us; or a foolish tongue wanders from the truth; or indolence overpowers our will, and we spend in some pleasure the time that ought to have been devoted to honest labour; or conceit makes us say and do things of which we ought to be ashamed; or angry pride has filled our souls even in the presence of God. Our besetting sin has clung to us, and we cannot get rid of it. At times we seem to have won the victory; we are ready to exclaim, 'I shall never be removed; Thou, Lord, of Thy goodness hast made my hill so strong.' And then the enemy has found us in an unguarded moment, and when once we give way our

strength to resist seems lost. Has not this happened again and again, not once only but many times, and are not we tempted to make no effort in what seems a hopeless case? We have resolved, and resolved again, and have prayed to God for aid, and we have endeavoured to watch ourselves, and have avoided many occasions which experience had told us were dangerous. And it has been all in vain.

And now if this be so, yet once more let us turn to God, and gaze upon the Cross of Christ. Let us not on this day make resolutions, or look forward in anticipation of battle. Let us think only of that sorrow which was beyond all other sorrows, and that love which caused all the sorrow. Let us think of our Lord sadly grieving at our weakness, and longing to help us, and praying for our recovery. Let us think of the bitter pain for Him to look forward, and see how little all His toil and pain would teach us. What is bitterer than to love and to love fondly, and to see one whom you love descend step by step into sin and folly? And this He saw, and yet His love was not made cold or feeble. And His bodily frame was weak, so weak that the fear of what was coming, and the weight of His sorrow, brought from Him the Bloody Sweat, and the prayer which He knew could not be granted. And yet He shrunk not away from what He had undertaken. Let us look on this till our thoughts are filled with the sight, till our hearts answer to the affection which thus could suffer, till we feel the cords

draw us, the cords of a man, and we sit at the foot of the Cross, and never wish to leave it. Let us carry this with us henceforward, and turn to this whenever we are sore beset. It cannot be in vain that all this love was shewn.

Or perhaps we have never really striven to serve God at all. We have lived as best suited the society in which we were, as most conduced to our own pleasure. The garden of our soul has been filled with noxious weeds, and we have never endeavoured to root them out. We have never prayed alone. We have but given our presence to the common prayers of Christians. And in church our thoughts have not turned to God, but have wandered to pleasures, to worldly hopes, to dreams pleasant to our fancy. We have thought little about another world. We have thought little about the hour of death, and the day of judgment. We are not wicked in the world's sense of wicked. We commit no murder or theft. We break no human laws. We respect all the rules of society. But whenever the thought of God or conscience comes across us, we immediately find that but a dull subject to think on, and we turn to pleasanter and more exciting themes.

What then shall warm our hearts but this plain story of sadness? If we have human feelings still left us, and sympathy can yet touch our souls, it will be impossible to read of the Cross of Christ without emotion. Let us follow our Lord from the Supper table, where His Betrayer ate with Him out of the same dish; to the garden

where He prayed for what He knew He could not and would not have; to the judgment-hall where the people of His love cried out, 'Crucify Him, crucify Him;' to the Cross where He seemed to have been forsaken by God, as He had been forsaken by all men. Here shall all men find the medicine to heal their sore disease. Who could sin in the presence of this depth of suffering? Who could refuse to be touched at heart? Proud thoughts, self-conscious contentment, cannot stand here. Cold hearts, callous feelings, must either turn away or melt; and alas, that so many should turn away. The sinner and the saint may here kneel down side by side: for the love which flows from those wounds washes the sinner as clean as the saint. We cannot cleanse ourselves. O Christ, do Thou cleanse us, as we kneel before Thee. Here may come the sinner sure of acceptance. He may have felt quite unable to sell all and follow Christ preaching and Christ working miracles. He may have been unconvinced by all the wisdom of the parables. The threats and the warnings, nay, the promises of mercy and the moving words, may have found his ears dull of hearing. But here he will kneel and think no more of himself, but only of his Lord, and be lost in the memory of this dark time. When nothing else has converted the sinner, this many times has been too much for him, and many times will it be again.

We come not here with desire to stand right in God's sight. We come not thinking of His justice, and asking

to be made holy, that His justice may have nothing to find fault with. We come not asking to be spared His wrath. Who could ask for anything for himself in the presence of all this suffering, all this suffering on his behalf. No, we come asking to be taken to His heart; for the love of a Father we beg, for the pardon which brings us to His bosom; not for that pardon which only spares the rod; we cannot here think of punishment; we cannot ask simply that our own pain shall be lessened; we do not think of that, but of Christ. We have been away from Him. We long to come back to Him. Lord, receive us once more to Thy love and do with us what Thou wilt.

We come as sheep that have gone astray. We hasten to the Shepherd whose voice we hear calling us from afar. He hath sought us long. We think not of the pastures, but of Him; to lie in His bosom, to be carried in His arms, to hear His words of comfort once more, to see His face, to feel that we are pressed to His heart.

We come as the Prodigal Son. We think not of the pleasures of our Father's house. We think not of the joys which belong to the saints. We think not of heaven nor of hell now. We think of Him, of our Father. We long once more to be near Him, to see Him, to hear Him, if that at least may be ours which we so little deserve. We come not asking for holiness, nor for forgiveness, nor for happiness, nor for peace, nor for protection. We come asking to be let once more to live with Him, and

for nothing else. Christ is all in all, and here we can think of nothing else; if only we may be permitted kneeling at His feet to embrace the Cross on which He hangs, and never again to move from His sight.

We come not here with fears. We come not trembling with anxiety how we shall be received. We come not because we are terrified by the thoughts of the wrath to come. Nay, these things we think not of at all. We come not because we find sin is unhappiness; if it was that which brought us to Jerusalem, it is not that which makes us hasten to Calvary. We come because love constraineth us, and we are drawn with the cords of a man.

We come not with high hopes, with thoughts of future usefulness, or of high rank and place among the children of God. We come not now with dreams of saintliness that we shall win by long and patient striving. We think not of fighting a noble battle, and of self-applause, and of a happy consciousness that God has been working in us. We come not in the strength of a firm will and a determined purpose. We cannot look at these things now. All these are good, but now we have no thoughts to spare for them. To be with Christ, the love of Christ, to be accepted as His, to be embraced by His arms, that is what we ask. There is nothing else in the whole world but He alone. We come to be with Him.

O Lord Jesu Christ, take us to Thyself, draw us with

cords to the foot of Thy Cross; for we have not strength to come, and we know not the way. Thou art mighty to save, and none can separate us from Thy love. Bring us home to Thyself; for we are gone astray. We have wandered; do Thou seek us. Under the shadow of Thy Cross let us live all the rest of our lives, and there we shall be safe.

SERMON II.

EASTER DAY.

ROMANS viii. 38, 39.

'For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.'

THE return of Easter should be to the Christian life the call of a trumpet. It is the news of a great victory. It is the solution of a great perplexity. It is the assurance of a great triumph. It is the capture of an enemy's last stronghold. It crowns the work of Christ. It exhibits the love of God. It demonstrates the truth of conscience. It was expected by prophets; it was witnessed by apostles; it is the foundation of apostolic doctrine; and the chief purpose of the apostolic office, as St. Peter declares, was to bear witness to the resurrection of Christ. When conscience has reiterated the message that she brings from God, when she has bid us believe in spite

of sight and in spite of experience, when the contradiction of things around us has only made her voice more peremptory, there still remains, as it seems, one fact which she cannot touch, an unanswerable source of doubt. Conscience is ever talking of truth, of justice, of purity, of unselfishness, of absolute self-devotion. The visible world seems to mock her message with examples of its falsehood. We see and we cannot help seeing the lie very often successful, and justice very often set aside; the hypocrite trusted, and the oppressor popular; the simple frowned upon, and the ill-treated scorned; we see impure pleasures unpunished, and selfishness attaining its ends; presumption making others yield, and conceit winning undue praise. We see wrong stronger than right, and selfishness more blessed than self-denial, and conceit more honoured than humility; and still the voice within, unsilenced by the evidence of facts, repeats with increasing emphasis that, in spite of all that we see, right is stronger than wrong, and truth is better than falsehood, and purity shall prevail over sensual indulgence, and meekness shall inherit the earth, and the persecuted shall reign as kings. But then the world, within which our senses and our outer experience are confined, seems to reply by one unanswerable argument, the argument of death. Can conscience or obedience to conscience save a man from that universal doom, or fulfil its promises before that doom shall come? After all that conscience preaches, what becomes of her disciples? Is there any

difference between the end of a wise man and the end of a fool, between the end of holiness and the end of profligacy? Will self-denial make life longer? Will justice send death away? Conscience herself passes away with the spirit in whom she has dwelt; the body that her possessor dwelt in turns to dust. However good he was, however upright, we see him no more; we have no more evidence of his existence. Men may remember him, but what is memory to the dead? His work may live that he hath left behind him; but he himself is gone. Gone without having received any measure of that absolute justice which conscience promised. Absolutely perished as far as our senses or understanding can tell, without any chance of having the injustice of the world towards him set right. The wicked man dies in the full enjoyment of the success won by his wickedness; the good man without any of that redress which conscience is never tired of telling us is the fundamental law of all things.

And no doubt if this had been all that God had vouchsafed to give us, it would have been enough. Conscience would still have repeated her proclamation even in the face of death itself, and not the visible destruction of the earthly frame, nor the absolute departure of the enlivening spirit, would have silenced her voice or justified us in disobeying her commands, or refusing to believe His promises.

But God, who always gives in greater abundance than

we need, has this day supplied us with a fuller answer, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel. On this day it has been shewn by visible proof that the spiritual power cannot be held in the chains of the earth, and that death itself, in spite of its apparent universality, is not the Supreme Ruler of the universe. There is a power which can burst its bonds. The voice of conscience is right. This life is not the end of all things, and the course of this life is not enough to measure the reckoning of eternal justice. Right is stronger than wrong, and truth lasts longer than falsehood, and purity is more precious and more enduring than sin; for right and truth and purity are summed up in their champion Christ, and He has this day vanquished death, the one unconquerable champion of the enemy.

There is nothing new in all this; for indeed the highest truths can never be new. But this is not a day for new truths, but rather for forcing upon the mind the deep unchangeable certainty of those lessons which we have heard so often before; lessons whose novelty in fact depends not on our ears having never before heard them, but on our souls having now begun to feel their power. That Christ's resurrection opens to us a gate through which we can as it were look into another world; that this day breaks down the wall which shuts us in on every side, and shews us there beyond it God, and the angels, and the spirits of the just, and Christ our

Redeemer and our Master; that this day promises a certain entrance into the kingdom where conscience shall no longer contradict experience, a certain share in the triumph wherewith the power of holiness shall trample down the power of evil; this is no news to the mind. But you can make it new and thrilling to the heart in a day, aye, or in a moment. Try to live by it; try to live as if that other world were immediately before your eyes; try to live as if you were following your great Captain on the road to victory; and believe me you will never find the doctrine stale or commonplace or powerless.

Live by it in the first place by making that foresight of another world the standard by which you measure this world. Think of all pleasures, of all solicitations, of all pursuits as you will think of them then. A few years more, and how utterly indifferent you will be to the chief enjoyments of this world. You will be standing in the presence of Christ; how little you will care how successful you may have been, how rich you may have been, how admired, how delighted with abundance of applause. How absolutely nothing will seem the most important concerns of this life. But will all that has happened here seem nothing? No, indeed. Christ will remind us of the work that He gave us to do. He will remind some of us that He put us under guidance appointed by Himself. He will say to one, 'I put you under parents whose words you were to obey. They gave you the task

appointed for you. The issue of your work is not of the slightest consequence. Whether you succeeded or not is of no moment whatever; that was in My hands, not in yours. But the spirit in which you set about it, the diligence, the cheerfulness, the earnestness with which you obeyed, what was that?' He will say to another, 'I gave you a work to do in the world. The whole world is Mine, and all the various pursuits of men are My ordinance. How your work turned out I do not ask. But how did you do it?' He will say to another, 'I bid you wait for Me; I required no work; I only required your heart's devotion. How was that devotion paid?' At that hour, my brethren, we shall care very little for past success or failure, for past pleasure or pain. To have missed this distinction, to have lost that enjoyment, will be facts totally without interest in our memory. But with what feelings shall we then remember the lie, the scoff, the impatient outbreak of temper, the impure thought, the pilfering what was not ours, the act of cruelty, the act of unfairness! Such things which now just give our conscience a passing twinge, with what burning weight shall they then press upon our hearts! A new mode of measuring all things shall then be taught us. A new balance shall be put into our hands. Nay, it is put into our hands now, if we will but use it; but then we shall have no other. To live by the memory of the Resurrection is to begin at once to use this new estimate; to begin at once to declare ourselves soldiers

of Christ, of Christ our conquering Captain, who shall lead us at last into the Kingdom of Light, and enable us to overcome whatever bars our passage.

Once more, to live by the doctrine of Easter is to have done with cowardice and half-heartedness. We make our victory a great deal more difficult than it ought to be by want of courage. There are many faults and many weaknesses which require nothing more than a decisive effort, a determined push, to overcome them at once and for ever. If you want to live a Christian life do not dally with your purpose; do not fancy that you will find it easier to win your way by degrees, and that by a gradual change you may attain to the same end with less pain than you fear will be given by a sudden wrench. Nothing can be a greater mistake. Press into the enemy's citadel at once: do not wait outside till he has had time to shoot you down. In with you heart and soul. If your faults are open and known, then at once make it clear to yourself and your friends, not by foolish boasting, but by quiet firm self-control, that you mean to make a thorough change. If your faults are secret, cut them off by one vigorous effort. Be assured that God will help you. Be assured that Christ will give you strength. If there is any truth in the Bible at all, this must be true, that neither past sins nor present and future temptations can prevail against you; for Christ's Atonement has crossed out the one, and Christ's power will trample down the other. I know you will meet with many failures

between this and the grave; but I am sure that you will meet with fewer failures in proportion to your courage, for this kind of courage is but another form of faith, and faith can work any miracle whatever, even the greatest miracle of all, bringing your soul to God.

Lastly, to live by the doctrine of Easter is to fill your service with happiness. We often make our duties harder by thinking them hard. We dwell on the things we do not like till they grow before our eyes, and at last, perhaps, shut out heaven itself. But this is not following our Master, and He, we may be sure, will value little the obedience of a discontented heart. The moment we see that anything to be done is a plain duty, we must resolutely trample out every rising impulse of discontent. We must not merely prevent our discontent from interfering with the duty itself; we must not merely prevent it from breaking out into murmuring; we must get rid of the discontent itself. Cheerfulness in the service of Christ is one of the first requisites to make that service Christian; for among the works of Christ's Spirit, wherever they are enumerated, you will always find joy mentioned among the very first. This joy in obeying, this happiness in the sense of Christ's help, this cheerfulness in the sight of God and man, is one of the great missionary powers on earth, second only to the power of love. And if we would ask how, without any ostentation, we can best obey our Lord's commands, to let our light shine before men, so that they shall glorify our Father in

Heaven; how we can combine such a command with the direction not to let our left hand know what our right hand doth; the answer is, let all men read in your face the happiness of a Christian that loves his Master. Let them see in your unvarying cheerfulness, the assurance of your faith, and the certainty of your hope, and the blessedness of your love.

These three, thoughtfulness, courage, and cheerfulness, are the lessons of Easter Day. To carry about with us the thought of the other world; to go boldly to our duties in the strength of our victorious chief; to wear upon our faces the cheerfulness which our faith deserves; these are the lessons that we should carry from this day into our daily life. And not all that is in heaven or in earth shall rob us of the strength which God will impart to those who have once learnt such lessons as these.

SERMON III.

FIRST LOVE.

REVELATION ii. 4.

'*Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love.*'

We do not know very much of the early Church of Ephesus, to which these words are spoken, but all that we do know harmonises with the position assigned to that Church in this part of the Book of Revelations. Whether the seven Churches mean seven ages of the Church, or seven phases of its character, or seven marked epochs in its life, I do not mean now to discuss. But I think it plain that, in some way or other, these seven Churches represent the Church as a whole, and that each is typical of a special state of feeling, of life, of thought, either pervading that whole or to be found in it. This seems to me particularly indicated, not merely by the lesser touches which distinguish what is said to each Church in succession, but also by the regularly arranged series of promises which accompany the Epistle, for it is

an Epistle from the beginning. The blessings of Paradise before the Fall, of deliverance from the Flood, of the manna in the wilderness, of the triumphs of Solomon's vast empire, are promised to the first four Churches; the blessings of Baptism, of Church membership, of a seat in the great Court of Justice which is to judge the world, are promised to the last three. Thus covering the whole space from the Creation to the Judgment-day, and making the seven Churches correspond with the entire range of God's government of mankind.

In this scheme, then, the Church of Ephesus occupies the place of the Garden of Eden, and has the blessings and the dangers, the weakness and the strength, of the dwellers in that garden. It is the type of the first love, not of the last love; the love, that is, of untried and inexperienced innocence, not the love of tried and veteran holiness: the love that knows no fear not because it has learned to trust, but because it has not yet learned that there is danger before it; the love that anticipates no slackening of its own warmth, that dreads no downfall, that expects no defeat, that sees no difficulty; the love of Peter exclaiming 'Bid me come unto Thee on the water,' or saying that he was ready for prison and for death; the simple unforeboding love of childhood, content with the present sense of being in favour with its father, and never thinking of losing that favour again, or its sense of that favour. Of such love and of such religious feelings, this Church of Ephesus is

here the type. And the little that we know of its earliest history agrees with this. There had been up to this time, as far as we know, in the Church of Ephesus no disorders such as had troubled Corinth; no fanaticism such as had troubled Thessalonica; no violent schisms such as rent in twain almost every Church that St. Paul had founded. The Epistle to the Ephesians is the only one of St. Paul's Epistles in which we find no trace of the need for grave rebuke, the only one in which the warnings and the precepts do not seem to imply grave disorders. The tone of that Epistle implies moreover no ordinary state of religious feeling in the readers. Not to every Church could St. Paul have written on such a subject as the Communion of Saints, which is the subject of that Epistle; still less in such an exalted and extatic strain. But he seems to have thought that they could enter into all that he said, and could appreciate by the aid of their own experience the power of that indwelling Communion which makes all saints one, and knits them into the Body of Christ.

Such was the Church and such its blessings; and here we find it receiving a warning because it had left its first love.

What Christian is there who does not feel pierced through by the words? What Christian is there who does not repeat the warning in his ears, 'I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love?' Sometimes we are uplifted by high-wrought feelings till

no service seems too hard, no self-denial too severe: our resolution appears sufficient for a repetition of all previous trials and many beside them: in the warmth and earnestness of our feelings old temptations fall off like a garment, and we are more disposed to wonder that we were ever enslaved than to fear that we shall be enslaved again. Selfishness, impurity, cowardice, falsehood, indolence, these seem impossible thenceforward for ever. Sometimes too we draw for ourselves pictures of what we shall one day be; how true and trustworthy, how pure and unselfish, how high-minded and generous, how devoted and self-denying. And sometimes we are fain to surround ourselves with fences on all sides, and to refuse this, and to abstain from that. And sometimes we propose to ourselves noble models, and make new models still beyond them in our fancy. Our first love is sometimes to love much, and sometimes to serve much; to be beyond most other men in strictness of truth, and generosity of character, and unswerving justice; or, if we have been much vexed by faults, our first love is a will so strong that it is unshaken by all the assaults of temptation, and moves unscathed through the most trying dangers.

I have called this, first love. But yet it is not once only in life that such high-wrought feeling seems for a time to transport us out of ourselves. It may return often, and it may come late, and it may take occasion of every outward change; it may fill us with hope each

time that we are raised by voices within or by circumstances without. It may gain even strength each time over the last, so that each time we shall feel as if all previous occasions were but preludes to this.

And then comes the languor which is almost sure to follow; the return to our ordinary ways and habits; the gathering of old temptations with new ones added; the discovery that these high impulses have not made after all any, or any great, difference in our character; the sense of weariness at our prayers; the want of all delight in worship, public or private; the loss of all keen sensibility of conscience. Wrong which we know to be wrong, yet seems not so very wrong as it did. It seems folly to fence ourselves in by such strict rules. Resolutions once made with great fervour seem the fruit of mere excitement. Perhaps our own warmth and earnestness when we look back on it seems to wear a kind of theatrical air; and we begin to think it was unreal, sentimental, vague. And, perhaps, in some degree it was so. And so we are in danger of being untrue to our first love; because when we come into this world our eyes are not strong enough to pierce below the surface, and see the truth of God behind the unreality of things, and our memory is not able to retain the impression of our purer and better moments. We seem as it were, after a little while, to forget ourselves. Yes, it seems like a lapse of memory; for we did look for a moment into the perfect law of liberty, and we did see there in that

word sent from heaven what we might be, what we have the capacity to be, and we have come away and straightway forgotten what manner of men we were.

And above all other fluctuations, who has not passed through the sad, the dangerous recoil of repentance? Who has not been at some time or other—nay, every Christian is so more than once in every week—keenly sensible of sin, and penitent before God, and unhappy till he has regained something like a sense of forgiveness? And that sense of forgiveness which is generally given by God in answer to a clear resolution, and a heart laid quite open before Him, very often gives a peace even greater than we had experienced before we sinned. We are like children that have been away from home, and come back to it with a new affection. How easy seem all duties at such moments; how weak all temptations; how ready we are to thank God for our freedom, and to exult in what He has given, and to silence the warning doubts that will sometimes come across our minds, by repeating that it is God's doing and not ours that we are free. We feel as if now for the first time we really loved the ways of holiness; now for the first time have we learnt to the full the misery of sin and the tenderness of our Saviour. And then this very happiness brings the reaction, and the very passion of our penitence seems to prepare us for a fall by weakening and enervating our whole being. We fall away from this our first love, and neglect to do our first works.

Now let us clearly understand what it is that God will give us, and what it is that He requires of us. These feelings that I have been describing, this warmth, this sense of safety, this freedom from temptation will fluctuate. God bestows it, and God will not bestow it constantly, nor just when we ask for it, nor even just when we fancy that we most need it. He gives it as He sees to be best for us. At times He will fill our hearts with religious peace and joy. At times He will leave us as it were to ourselves, and allow our sky to be darkened with clouds. It is no doubt better for our growth in grace, for our spiritual education, that it should be so. It is better that we should learn to serve Him both in sunshine and in shade, to cling to Him both when He seems to smile on us and when His face seems to be turned away. We must not allow ourselves to be cast down, nor to despair because our hearts seem colder at one time than at another. The test of the cold heart is the yielding to sin, and if we are clinging to Him, and to His will, we may be quite sure that what we take for coldness of heart is a trial, not a treason. It is not inconstancy to our first love that we are not so passionate as we were, if we have not given our hearts to any other love, or swerved from the duties which love imposes.

But if so, why is this first love given? Why are we so exalted only to be cast down? Why are we so deeply stirred only to harden, as it seems, once more? I need hardly put the question. No one who has really felt the

power of such moments will ask why were they sent. What if they go so soon? Yet their memory never goes. They are the hour of insight, the hour of revelation, when the truths of the other world can be seen for a short time, when the path in which God means us to walk is traced as it were on a map before the sight, when the task and work of years are commanded.

> And tasks in hours of insight willed,
> In hours of gloom may be fulfilled.

Whether the light they give spread far or near, whether they shew us our way for the moment or point to a distant future, they teach us a lesson which does not lose its value when the teacher has left our side. The will does not really lose its strength to obey because the hour for feeling is past, and the hour for real obedience is come. The power to serve is still left, though the service no longer seems easy or delightful; and the knowledge to serve remains behind as well as the power. Through life shall a man be recalled from apathy, from selfishness, from folly, from sin, by the memory of that first love. Through life will he be awoke from slumber by remembering what he once meant to be, and by contrasting it with what he is. Through life will holy resolutions, even though their fulfilment has sadly fallen short of their idea, yet spur him out of sinful rest, and compel him to pursue his heavenward course. 'Are these your promises to yourself?' will conscience ever be saying; 'Is this the purity and the

truth which once you meant to make your own? Is this the service that you vowed in the warmth of your first love? Remember from whence thou art fallen, and repent and do the first works.'

But is there any one aid which may assist us to keep constant to this love when God has put it in our hearts? which may help us if not to retain its warmth, for that we know we cannot always do, yet at any rate to retain the power of its memory and the firmness of its purpose? There are two chief aids to this; prayer to God and communion with the good. Prayer to God regular and earnest, never intermittent for any reason, never hurried over for any weariness or for any coldness; this is one chief means of keeping our spiritual growth healthy and alive. And the friendship and companionship of those who shew a desire to live Christian lives is the other. In reality they are both one. For both have their power from the communion which they give us with what is good. In prayer we have communion with God as He is revealed to us in our consciences and in the Bible; in the friendship of His servants we have communion with the fragments, as it were, of His brightness reflected from human lives. But of these two I would lay especial stress upon prayer, because its power is generally both greater and more sure. If we would live in any degree by that ideal which our better selves sometimes set before us, if we would maintain our constancy to that first love which God gives as one of His chiefest blessings, and which is

indeed in its measure a revelation of Himself, we must steadily maintain the habit of regular prayer. For whether or not we are conscious of it at the time, there is a calm and unceasing strength which can be thus engrafted on our souls, and thus only. Thus only shall we be able, even though we may never realise all that our first love dreamed, yet to fill our whole lives, from end to end, with the power which that first love gave, and, even if we fall, return once more to those first works which that love taught. Thus shall we find in that first love the tree of life which standeth in the midst of the paradise of God.

SERMON IV.

LOVE AND DUTY.

ST. MATTHEW V. 19.

'*Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven.*'

THERE are two chief instincts implanted by God in the soul as seeds out of which our spiritual life is to grow; one of these is the instinct of duty, the other is the instinct of love. Throughout the New Testament we are taught that of these two the instinct of love is the greater. The instinct of duty prompts us to do what is right for its own sake; to think of no consequences, of no disagreeables, of no allurements, but simply to hold fast to what we know that we ought to do and to be. The instinct of love prompts us to try to please our parents, to please our Lord, to think of God as a tender and loving Father, to come to Him in sorrows, in difficulties, to feel sure that He will help us, and to count upon His help. The instinct of duty, when it is come to its full strength, thinks first of that great Law which governs all the universe, the Law of Holiness and

Justice. The instinct of love ever turns its eyes not so much on the law as on the Lawgiver, not on holiness but on God. To feel not proudly but humbly, not with any exaltation but with simple sincerity, that we have kept the path in which we ought to walk, that is the highest reward of the instinct of duty. To feel that God loves us, that we are His children, that we are as it were holding by His hand, that His eye is resting on us with tender affection, that is the highest reward of the instinct of love.

Now, as I have just said, the instinct of love is the higher, the more heavenly. Our nature is more lifted above itself by that which unites us to our Maker than by that which keeps our path straight. There is a purifying, a penetrating power in the thought of God which can never flow from the bare thought of duty. We express this in various ways in our common speech. We say, and say rightly, that the religious character is higher than the moral character, and that religion ranks higher than morality. We mean the same thing when we put the Gospel above the law, and grace in the heart above correctness of life. We constantly make all sorts of allowances for the faults of those who shew underneath their faults a heart susceptible of real love, the love of God and of Christ. For we know that there is a life and a genial heat in the instinct of love which can work miracles on the soul, and change a man into a new creature.

All this is plain enough. But the text,—and remember that the text was spoken by our Lord Himself,—so far from saying that the commandments are of no consequence in comparison with the spirit which rules our life; so far from telling us that if we give our hearts to God all faults and neglects of duty are trifles hardly to be thought of; so far from encouraging the notion that obedience is a small matter, that the affections are everything and the conduct nothing, declares that neglect of even the least commandment lowers a man's rank in the kingdom of Heaven. And the words which follow are, if possible, stronger still, for the disciples are told that unless their righteousness, that is plainly their obedience, exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, they should not enter the kingdom of Heaven at all. Our Lord, you see, is by no means satisfied with those who are ever pleading, 'I mean well; I try my best; I wish to do right,' and who fancy that their faults are therefore trifles because of their good intentions. We are justified in feeling sure that we are forgiven if we have honestly repented of anything wrong, but we are not justified in fancying that the wrong was therefore nothing. Whatever may be the value of love, duty has still its place, and must not be lightly thrust aside.

The fact is, that if duty be not so holy a power as love, yet, as long as we remain here, we need the strength of duty as much as we do the fire of love. If we compare our characters to our bodies, duty cor-

responds to the bones, love to the veins, and nerves, and vital organs. Without duty our character becomes weak, loose, inconsistent, and soon degenerates or even perishes for want of orderliness and self-control. Without love our character is a dead skeleton, with all the framework of a living creature, but without the life. There are moments in our lives (I suppose all have felt them at different times) when we seem not to need anything to keep us right but our own hearts. Sometimes after more earnest prayer than usual, after sincere repentance, after being touched to the heart by some incident that has happened to us, or, perhaps, for no reason at all that we could name, we have felt as if we should hardly ever go very wrong any more: we have felt as if we hardly needed any very great care of ourselves: we have felt so deeply happy, so strong, not in our own strength but in God's; so free from temptation, that our great danger seemed to ourselves to be entirely over. Our insight into God's truth, our hold upon His help, our surrender of our wills to His, have seemed such as to warrant a well-grounded hope that we need not fear any more. At such times it often seems as if all rules and prescribed duties were useless; we might safely trust to our own impulses. And sometimes it really is the case that high-wrought feeling will for a time render all thought about duty quite unnecessary; we shall do right from a spontaneous impulse, and shall not need to force ourselves or to thwart our inclination. But all this lasts but a

brief, generally a very brief space; and when the eagerness of this unusual warmth has gone, when our hearts are chilled again and dead, when our wills are languid, and temptations resume their old power, what shall uphold us? Certainly there is no steadier stay in such moments than a strong sense of duty. The steady discharge, even the mechanical discharge of the duties of the day, saves our religious life from being a mere weak alternation of fits of warmth and fits of coldness, fits of joy and fits of depression. The resolute will that allows no mere mood ever to interfere with the appointed work of the present moment is, as it were, the backbone of the truly religious character. The instinct of love, glorious as it is, yet may degenerate into mere dreamy feeling, into sentimental sorrow for sin, and sentimental longing for a holier life. That which saves it from this degenerate end is the strong steady sense of duty. And there is no one quality which it is better for us, in every sense, to form, to retain, to cherish in our souls, than this.

This much is to be said of a sense of duty with reference to our own religious character. But much, very much more value must we assign to it when we remember that our service to God in this world in which we are placed is not the mere offering our own individual wills, but the fulfilling in concert with our fellow-men of those many wise purposes which are to be here worked out. We are meant to work together.

No man can serve God well quite alone. And a great deal of our service depends to an almost infinite degree on the concerted action of those who have to render it. Now, there is certainly no quality which is more indispensable for all joint labour than a strong sense of duty. There is nothing which is more absolutely essential to any man who could serve his country, or the Church of Christ, or his neighbours. When you are at work with a man who shows a strong sense of duty, you know beforehand that you have no need to provide against the possible contingency that he may fail you; you know that he will do his part to the best of his power, and that you may give your whole attention to your own part; and often, very often, the power of thus confining your attention to what you have to do makes all the difference between success and failure. In public life a man who shews a strong sense of public duty will invariably do more, and will eventually command more respect by far, than one who with more talent can less be relied on. In private life it is the same character which carries the highest estimate, and consequently exercises the widest and best influence. And these are visible tokens by which God plainly marks out the kind of character that He would have us emulate.

This, too, is the cause that some professions which one would not naturally have supposed to rank high in any Christian estimate, yet do rank high, and always have ranked high. Who would have supposed that the

profession of arms, the profession of fighting and bloodshed, could be rendered noble by any kind of influence? But yet all men respect it, and are right in respecting it. And the reason is that in a very peculiar degree it is the characteristic of that profession to put a strong sense of duty above everything else. A soldier may require many other qualities to make him professionally perfect. But this is the first, and without this he is fit for nothing. And so, although military duty is after all but a poor and narrow thing, yet because it is so firmly upheld, because those who profess it are prepared to sacrifice to it comfort and pleasure and even life itself, at a moment's notice, therefore we honour the soldier. We honour him, and we cannot help honouring him, as a man who puts everything else at once aside in comparison with the duty of his calling. The duty is not the best nor the loftiest; it permits much evil of the very worst kind; but such as it is, it is real and it is supreme, and therefore our hearts respect it.

Love is higher than duty, just as it is more excellent to worship God than to hold fast by a rule, however excellent that rule may be. But the reason is that love in reality contains duty in itself. Love without a sense of duty is a mere delusion from which we cannot too soon set ourselves free. Love is duty and something more. Love is a noble tree of which duty is the trunk. Love is a beautiful plant with a beautiful flower of which

duty is the stalk. 'This is the love of God,' says St. John the apostle of love, 'that we keep His commandments.' Feelings come and go, and impulses are sometimes excellent, and sometimes base, and sometimes noble, and sometimes silly; and the value of any man's character depends quite as much on his concealing and repressing what ought to be repressed, as on his acting upon what deserves to be acted on. The devotion to God and to God's service, which will gradually grow to greater and greater strength and ripeness in the heart of any Christian, includes most assuredly a certain bent and direction of the feelings and impulses, but it is not itself made up of them and of them alone. It includes also something deeper than all feelings and steadier than all impulses. And especially it includes that sense of duty of which I have been speaking. The instinct of love and the instinct of duty appear to be distinct, and the loving affectionate character is not the same as the carefully obedient character. But if the instinct of love is ever to reach its true perfection, it must absorb the instinct of duty into itself, and make the sense of duty stronger, and deeper, and keener, and the obedience more careful and more inflexible.

This sense of duty is just the very part of our character which God puts particularly into our own hands. We can form it within our hearts, and there is nothing else that we are more bound to do than this. We are to build up within our souls a temple fit for the Lord

to dwell in. And the material out of which we are to build it is left very much to our own choice; gold, silver, precious stones; or wood, hay, stubble. That which is required above everything else to give it strength and firmness is a strong sense of duty, that sense of duty which resolutely does the appointed duty of the hour, even with mechanical exactness; simply and quietly; because it is the duty of the hour, and needing no other reason. Such a character if it be dedicated to the service of Christ, and so learns to add love to duty, becomes the highest that we know on earth.

SERMON V.

COMING TO CHRIST.

ST. MATTHEW xi. 28.

'Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.'

COMING to Christ is the crown of repentance. It is the only kind of repentance that really gives rest and peace. It is the only repentance that stills the tumult of the soul, and makes repenting sweet instead of bitter. And yet there is much other and genuine repentance besides this; and as we know that every good gift comes from God, so we may be sure that even repentance that falls short of this standard is still His work, and is in its degree accepted with Him. It is not perhaps a very noble thing to be cured of a fault by punishment. And yet in this way faults are often cured, and in many cases the cure is quite complete. Whether the punishment be inflicted on us by our parents and our teachers in the discharge of their duty towards us as servants of God entrusted with our guardianship, or by our fellow-creatures in the working of human society and intercourse, or by the law of the land,

or by the operation of natural causes bringing on us either in body or in mind or in fortune the consequences of misconduct, punishment inflicted in these various ways is a medicine provided by God, and often with God's blessing cures a disease in the will or in the soul. To be cured of falsehood, of violent temper, of fleshly appetite, of indolence, of selfishness, by such means as these is unquestionably good as far as it goes. Such a repentance is not much, but yet it is not nothing. Nay, so deep is the gulf which separates wrong from right, that to be cured of one's own sin any how, by any motive, by any means would be an almost priceless gain. With deep thankfulness let us acknowledge our debt to the Providence of God, whenever the working of that Providence has freed the garden of the soul within us from any noxious weed. Let us with the Psalmist thank the Lord for giving us warning, whatever form the warning may have taken. If you have been set free from the temptations to any habitual sin by any motive whatever that is not positively wrong, by fear of punishment, by self-interest, by pain, you have gained infinitely in the bargain; and you owe the deepest gratitude to the God who has thus set you free. This kind of cure may be of little value; but it admits of many degrees, and it may be, ah! far more valuable than aught else that our lives can shew us. Many a Christian has in after life been able to look back and recognise God's hand first stretched out to save him in some merciful punishment.

Again, there is a still higher form of repentance, which proceeds not from punishment, but from affection. We are cured of faults not by the pain which they have brought on ourselves, but by the pain which they have given to those that love us. How often has a mother's sad face done far more than could have been done by all her anger, by all her punishment! How often has the hope of pleasing a father or a mother turned back the wandering feet, bent the knee in prayer to God, saved the soul from approaching too near a dangerous temptation! To do right to please others is not certainly the highest of all motives. The desire to please can be indulged too much; and as the world stands it quite as often leads us wrong as right. The mere liking to be liked, the delight in the pleasure of those whom we are fond of, is a dangerous guide. But it is a powerful impulse. And if it be enlisted in the service of God it will often keep us straight when few other powers can. And the more entirely we are led, not by mere liking, but by real love, the higher and the more excellent is this impulse sure to be. And when it leads us to live in the spirit of the fifth commandment we know that it stands all but at the highest; for our parents are by God's will declared alike by nature and by revelation the representatives of God Himself. To do right not because you feel it to be right, not because you love it, not because the desire so to live has kindled it in your heart, but simply to please father or mother; to avoid wrong, not because it

pains or disgusts you, not because you shrink from it as evil, not because you feel the wrong of it, and cannot bear to have your soul defiled, but simply because you have before your eyes the grave look of your father, the keen pain written in your mother's face; this is not the most excellent; yet still even this is an angel of God sent down from heaven to strengthen the fainting limbs, to guide the blind eyes, to bring home the wandering steps, and for this too the Christian will be deeply thankful.

Yet again there is a form of repentance in some senses higher still than the repentance of human affection, and yet even that is not the highest. For there are natures with a natural tendency to obey a Divine law rather than a Divine person. And these if they repent, full often are sorry for what wrong they have done simply as wrong, and not because it has brought punishment on themselves, or because it has pained those whom they love. You may say that they fret and cannot bear to feel lowered in their own eyes; or you may say that their conscience has reproached them, or you may say that their eyes have been fixed on a pure and holy ideal which they know that they have not realised. The fact is, that on the one hand they see that they have done wrong, and are deeply, seriously sorry for it, and are resolutely determined not to do it again, and will keep this resolution; and so by slow and steady steps they will in the strength that God supplies be ever mounting nearer to Him. And yet on the other hand they are not much drawn personally to Christ

Himself. I do not mean that they are proud, or that they repent in their own strength, or that they fail to cherish a deep sense of their own dependence on God's help. But they are always thinking more of having done wrong than of having pained Christ, and they are always longing rather to be cleansed than to be forgiven. They seek for God's help rather than for His love. They want to be guided rather than to be carried. They make their ideal to consist rather in obeying Him with a pure and a humble soul than in clinging to Him like a little child to a much loved father. They wish to be good rather than to be God's: to be Christ's servants rather than to be His children. They long to be free; free from the bondage of their own sin and sinful nature, free from the corruption and weakness which mar all their lives; free from the backslidings which fill their souls with bitterness and shame to think on; free from the repeated falls, the sense of evil in themselves, the terrible contrast between themselves and the holy law of God. They long, in short, for the glorious liberty of the children of God; and it is an excellent thing to long for; but excellent as it is, it is far better still to be filled with the love of God and of Christ.

This repentance is excellent, but what does it lack? It lacks a child-like faith. It lacks, after all, that simple faith which realises the other world in the midst of this, and which feels Christ's hand as it walks by Christ's side. Such Christians are often deep and true and religious men. They go from strength to strength, and with the

God of gods appeareth every one of them in Zion. They climb ever higher by God's strong help: and they have many most excellent gifts: but one gift they almost always have not, and that is the gift of joy in the Holy Ghost. Their religion does much, nay, it does every thing for them. It upholds them; it purifies them; it humbles them; it chastens them. But it rarely makes them quite happy. What happiness or cheerfulness you see in their faces is either brought there by a sense of duty, duty to their fellow-men and to their vocation as Christians, or is the fruit of innocent enjoyment of the pleasures that God has provided in this present world. But they do not find a well-spring of gladness in their religion. No doubt they are far happier with their religion than they would be without it. No doubt their conscience does not sting them as it does the impenitent. Even when conscience stings them there is always a sense of an upright aim; and the pain of conscience is altogether changed in its very nature, and the burden of it almost removed, the moment you have resolved to forsake for ever that which conscience has disapproved. And so these men have a real relief in their religion, and they share in the peace which Christ bestows on all who are His, whether near or far off. But real gladness, delight in the sense of Christ being close at hand, and their friend; delight in the love of Christ, such as they feel in the love of a loved relation; this they have not. They do not walk through the world with an abiding

sense, that Christ, though they cannot see Him, yet is always with them; that they have a warm and affectionate Friend close to them at every turn; that if they speak He will be sure to hear, and in His own way to answer; that He is putting on every burden, and He is watching the effect of every trial; that He is holding out His hand to save in every temptation, and that we have but to lay hold of it; and that if we sin, His sad face wears the token.

Such is the highest of all repentance; the repentance that comes to Christ as to a Friend who is able, and who, we are sure, is willing, to save and to comfort.

At such a season* as this, when day after day we read the narrative of the sufferings which made repentance possible, we must endeavour to rise to this. We must endeavour not merely to see that we have done wrong—much grievous wrong—but to come to Christ Himself to be forgiven. We must endeavour to think of Him as of one who deeply loved us, who still yearns after our love, whom we have not thought of as we ought. We have done wrong, but let all other wrong be swallowed up in the thought of the pain that we have given, that we are giving, to the soul of the most loving Friend of ours that ever lived. We read of His passion, and surely our hearts are touched by what we read. We read of a week of sorrow; sorrow foreseen, and doubled by being fore-

* Sunday before Easter.

seen; and yet, day by day, adding to the weight. And in all these sorrows what is it that is most sorrowful? Surely the pain of seeing the sins by which He was surrounded. At His last supper, what is the bitterness with which His cup is filled? It is the treachery of one of His disciples. In His last discourse, what is the pain which cannot be drowned even by His love? It is, 'All ye shall be offended because of Me this night.' In His arrest and imprisonment, what is the blow which we know as we read it must have struck most deeply to His heart? It is the kiss of the traitor; it is that His disciples forsook Him and fled. In His trial before Pilate, what is the greatest aggravation of His sorrows? It is the cry ringing in His ears, 'Crucify Him, crucify Him.' There beneath Him, as He stood in the governor's presence, was gathered the mass of His own countrymen; for every soul that was there He was ready to die, He was longing to suffer; and He looked and saw savage faces upturned towards Him, and mad voices demanding His blood; and what more could be added to the bitterness of His grief? And when He hung on the cross, we know that no pain which His body suffered could wring Him like the angry taunts of the thief by His side, of His countrymen gazing at His death.

Shall we perpetuate that awful sorrow by our coldness and hardness, and by forgetting all that we owe to Him? He is grieved with an unutterable grief when we do wrong, and His cross was but the expression of that

grief. Though we cannot see Him He is still here present; as present as when He was on earth, as sorrowful for the sin, which separates us from Him. Let this week be a time of reconciliation to Him when we shall pray somewhat more than usual; and not only more but more earnestly, more personally; seeking not only to be cleansed but to be forgiven, for His forgiveness is unlike all other forgiveness and cleanses while it forgives: seeking for His friendship, for He is willing to be our friend; teaching our imaginations to realize His presence, our hearts to lean on His aid; teaching ourselves not only to obey Him, but as far as we can to know Him by living with Him. That only will give us rest. All other repentance, believe me, is hard work; wearisome, cheerless; at the best it gives a sort of relief from pain. But coming to Christ gives real joy to the heart and life. It is excellent to repent in any way; and I would not bid you slight God's gifts by thinking little of any real amendment that God may work in you. But yet shew I you a still more excellent way. Come unto Christ and He will give you rest.

SERMON VI.

THE GIFT OF THE SPIRIT.

1 THESSALONIANS v. 19.

'Quench not the Spirit.'

THERE is no need to dwell on the differences which distinguish the gifts of the Spirit in these days from the similar gifts in the days of the Apostles. To each time God will of course assign such forms of His Grace as suits that time. And we may be quite sure that at all times He gives the gifts of His Spirit to His servants, and that if in some respects we cannot compare ourselves with the early Church, in other points we have advantages of our own equal to theirs. It is a foolish and mischievous mistake to exaggerate the blessings of the present day; to be puffed up because of our superior knowledge, our greater clearness of understanding, our wider range of thought. It is an equally mischievous mistake to exaggerate the blessings of the past; to dwell upon the faith, the fervour, the heavenly-mindedness of the early Church, until we fancy that it is useless to endeavour to live in their spirit, or to be guided by their rules.

In whatever sense and in whatever measure they had God's most precious gifts, in the same sense and in equal measure are the same gifts within our reach also. And hence their lives are still our models; their encouragements, their warnings, still apply to us.

I have no doubt that when St. Paul bid the Thessalonians not to quench the Spirit, he was thinking of that deep fiery impulse which seems to have seized and moved those early converts, to have ruled their affections, their thoughts, their lives, and, more like a passion than a principle, to have made them consciously and visibly new creatures. In reading the records of that time, especially the chief records, St. Paul's epistles, the gift of the Spirit seems rather to have laid hold on the men than the men to have received the Spirit. They were carried out of themselves, and though just as capable of doing wrong as we are now, they seem to have been at any rate incapable of being cold and lukewarm. It was not till some time later that the temper of the Church of Laodicea, that temper neither hot nor cold, which has so often seemed to a Christian reader of modern days the very mirror in which he saw his own character; it was not till St. Paul was near his end that we find traces of this or anything like this. The gift of the Spirit in the earlier times was more like an impulse than a guide; more like an intuition than a clear understanding; had more feeling than thought, more instinct than reflection.

But still it was in reality the same One Guide, the

Light which lighteth every man, the Revelation of the one truth. Whether it comes like an altogether new faculty, a new sense seeing what was not before seen, and feeling what before was never felt; or whether it comes like a new enlightenment of an old faculty, clearing up what before was dark; whether it be a new eye, or a new light to lighten the old eye; it is still the same gift, the guide sent down from heaven, the messenger from the very presence of God. To us it takes the form of the enlightenment of a faculty common to all men. All men have some sort of conscience. The gift of the Spirit always, or almost always, comes to us as an enlightenment and a strengthening of that universal possession. Even those who have turned to God quite suddenly will always now describe their own change as an awaking, an opening of their eyes, rather than as a gift of new eyes which they had not before; while the great majority of Christians who cannot fix on any one moment of their lives as the absolute turning-point from evil to good, find it impossible in any way to distinguish between the voice of natural conscience and the warnings of the Spirit.

It is when we look at what those warnings are that we recognize unmistakeably the identity of the Divine Gift in all ages. That prompter which always holds before our eyes the purest and loftiest ideals of resolute devotion, of absolute unselfishness, of unstained purity, of loyalty never failing to the King that never fails in His

word, that can be none other than the messenger of God. We know, as we talk of the right, and the true, and the pure, and the heavenly, that there never was, there never can be, anything higher or nobler to live by. We know that there is no love higher or more divine than that which is ever drawing us up above ourselves, and teaching us to look and to long for greater purity, for more entire self-surrender. If the messenger comes to us wearing a different dress, a dress so different that we hardly recognize him to be the same with the inspirer of the early Church, yet his message is the same, and when we hear his words we cannot mistake. Still to us, as once to them, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report, are the aims which He sets before us; still to us, as once to them, every time that we read the Bible He bids us look to Jesus the author and finisher of our faith.

The message is the same, and the messenger is the same; and the warning how to treat Him is the same, 'Quench not the Spirit.' Put not out that heavenly fire which you did not kindle, but which you can extinguish. Put not out that holy fire which is the real heat of your life, and without which spiritual death is sure to follow. Put not out that fire by sensual pleasures and indulgence of fleshly appetites, as did Sodom and Gomorrah; by love of the world, as did Demas when

he forsook St. Paul; by careless neglect, as did the lukewarm Church of Laodicea.

The fire can be put out. You may put it out by indulgence of the body. The brutalising power of fleshly sins, of whatever sort, always blunts the conscience, and makes the spiritual eye unable to discern the true nature of God's requirements. A man who has given himself up to these becomes coarse. If the sins be such as men can see he becomes visibly coarse and earthly. If the sins be of the far wickeder and yet more secret sort, he often retains much outward refinement—refinement and even softness of manner, but coarseness and earthliness of soul; with little sense of disgust at impurity, with a low and animal idea of the highest of all affections. There is little room in such a soul for the loftiness of true generosity, for the humility of a heavenly mind, for the self-surrender of a loyal subject of God. Narrower and narrower through life become his aims and wishes, and still more his sympathies; poorer, and meaner, and coarser his best feelings; till the very highest that you ever see coming from him is a kind of earthly good-nature, and the purity and saintliness of the Christian character he not only cannot imitate, he cannot even understand it—perhaps not even admire it.

Yet, again, the fire can be put out by worldliness and a life devoted to self and selfish hopes. And surely of all modes of quenching the Spirit what can be more painful than this? For in such men it often happens

that their light is not put out though their heat is. As time goes on they still can see with ever-increasing clearness an ideal which they are prevented from reaching—aye, or even from seeking, by their ever-increasing weakness. What can be more miserable to think of than the condition of that man whose powers of mind have shewn him the truth of God, whose understanding has been too highly cultivated to allow him to shut his eyes to the eternal laws of heaven, who can appreciate, perhaps, till his very heart thrills with admiration, the high examples of love, of self-sacrifice, of a pure and brave service which history has recorded, and yet who cannot be, and who feels that he never can be, what he himself admires; who feels that while he admires the noble and the true, yet he is not attracted by it? No; he is attracted by the splendour, by the praise of men which accompanies such lives in after-times; by the satisfaction to his yearning vanity which such glory would supply; but not by the character itself, nor by its inner worth and substance. This is a painful state, and yet this is not the end. The end of such a character generally is to lose even this much appreciation of what is good, and to retain admiration for nothing but refinement without and resolute will within; to despise all self-sacrifice, all generosity, all nobleness as romantic and weak; and, of course, either to give up religion altogether, or to make a superstition to suit the worldly temper.

Lastly, and most often of all, the fire of the Spirit can be put out by mere neglect. The lukewarm Church of Laodicea, which neither lived for this world nor for the next, is the type of the commonest of all characters. The Spirit holds before the sight, time after time, soul-stirring visions of what our lives and characters might be. Thoughts start up unbidden before us and bid us walk in a new path, take up a new burden. As we read, as we live with our fellows, as we worship, as we listen, we are touched, we are enlightened, we are half roused to real resolution. But we hear not, or if we hear we make no effort; or if we make an effort, we soon give it up. The greatest thoughts, the noblest thoughts flit before the minds of men in whom their fellows suspect nothing of the kind; but they flit across as clouds flit across the sky, and those who share in them, yet feel them to be as unreal as those clouds. There is no waste in nature equal to the waste of noble aspirations. We see and are astonished at the wonderful prodigality of all creation; at the millions of animals which just come to the birth and yet are never born; at the minerals scattered everywhere in seemingly useless profusion; at the infinite space of heaven; at the countless host of the stars. But we cannot see the still more wonderful abundance of good and lofty thoughts—of visions of purity and holiness—of ideals of love and unselfishness, which the Spirit of God scatters like seed in the hearts of men, and scatters in vain. In vain, from

simple neglect; from neglect, like that of the virgins in the Parable who were quite satisfied so that their lamps burnt while men were looking on, and cared not for the want of oil which would surely put out their fire at last; from neglect such as is described in the Parable of the sower; they hear, and then cometh the Devil and taketh away the word out of their hearts. Christ stands at the door, and they hear Him knock, but they turn aside and never think of going to the door to let Him in. They hear the voice of truth, but it is no more than the sound of one that hath a pleasant voice, and can play well upon an instrument. What is the end of such coldness? The end is an incapacity to hear what they have so often heard in vain. In such men there comes at last an utter inability to understand that the message of God is a message to them at all. They hear and they understand, but they find no relation between their lives and what they learn. They will be selfish and will not know that they are selfish; they will be worldly and will not be able to see that they are worldly; they will be mean and yet be quite unconscious of their meanness.

The last, the final issue of 'Quenching the Spirit' I cannot describe. A fearful condition is once or twice alluded to in the Bible, which a man reaches by long disobedience to the voice within him, and in which he can never be forgiven, because he can never repent, and he cannot repent because he has lost all, even the faintest tinge, of the beauty of holiness. What brings a man into

such a state as this we cannot tell; but it is plain enough that the directest road to it is by 'Quenching the Spirit.' What God can do, what He will do, with those who thus quench the fire that He lights in their hearts, how can man say? How often, nay, whether at all He will re-kindle once more a fire which we have persisted in putting out, who can tell? Enough for us that nothing is so marked with tokens of this worst of all dangers as this sin of 'Quenching the Spirit.'

To quench the Spirit, to go on disobeying the calls of your own heart, to stifle the perpetually repeated warnings that recall you from sin and folly, to persist in sins which you know to be sins, to seek temptations which you know to be temptations, to harden your heart when you feel it to be softening, to let pride uphold you in evil, to let indolence or appetite seduce you from good, is as great a sin now as when St. Paul warned his converts against it, and is liable to the same condemnation. Great bursts of sin, sudden and unexpected falls, giving way to some torrent of temptation, this is fearful; and this when it happens costs us bitter tears and most painful repentance. But much more dangerous is the habit of disobedience which marks the soul with a slight mark every day, and heaps these marks one upon another till the whole soul be stained unawares.

Quench not the Spirit. You who are young, in whose souls there are ever heard new voices, before whose eyes there are ever shining new visions of what is your true

life, to whose sight are ever coming fresh lessons not yet faded by frequent appearance, Quench not the Spirit. Let not your hopes of attaining to a pure and Christian character be either worn out by neglect, or dashed aside by other aims, or daunted by many failures. In spite of all, keep still before you the brightness which is shewn, and every day will be more fully shewn to your sight the brightness of the souls of the sons of God. For this gift of the Spirit here on earth is the earnest of a still richer possession in Heaven, when we shall have received the adoption, and shall see our Father face to face.

SERMON VII.

GREAT MEN.

HEBREWS xii. 1.

'*Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us.*'

THE witnesses that God has set before the eyes of men are twofold, the witness of greatness and the witness of goodness, the witness of the hero and the witness of the saint. To name these two together is at once to put the one far above the other. Without any argument we feel at once that the hero and the saint belong to different spheres, the hero to nature, the saint to religion; the hero to the earth, the saint to heaven. We look for heroes in the annals of this world; in pagan times, in heathen countries, in statesmen, in soldiers, in great thinkers, in great discoverers. We look for saints in the annals of the Church of Christ; in apostles, in missionaries; perhaps, too, in secret and hidden retreats, in domestic life, in the sick bed. We expect saintliness to last in some way or other into

the other world beyond the grave; we hardly ever think of heroism except in connexion with this world. We reverence saintliness, giving it an honour in some way kindred to the honour which we pay to God; we admire heroism, but most often do not reverence it at all. But for all this let us not make the mistake of fancying that greatness does not testify to God's truth in its proper place and measure quite as truly as goodness. Let us not forget that there can be a Christian hero as well as a Christian saint. Let us not fancy that that admiration for heroism which the God who made us has kindled in our hearts, and not only kindled but fanned into a powerful and living flame, is after all counter to His will, hostile to His service, hurtful to all loyalty and devotion. These great men, even if they are not good men, but infinitely more if they *are* good men, are all witnesses to the truth of God, and leaders in the path of His will. What we have to do is not to quench our inborn admiration for greatness, but to see that the flame that it kindles in our hearts is an altar fire for the worship of our Master. The admiration that we spontaneously feel for great men either past or present is too deep, too universal, too powerful an impulse not to be meant for great purposes, and capable of holy uses.

If we examine what sort of a man we call great, we shall always find that it is one who leads his fellow-men. We do not call a man great simply for cleverness, nor for worldly success, the fruit of cleverness. Nor, again, do

we call a man great for exceeding goodness, if he have nothing in him which makes that goodness a guide, and not merely a reverenced wonder to his fellows. A great man is he who stands out from others, not for some accidental difference, but for something which makes others follow his lead, acknowledge his power, accept his teachings, admire his course. Such a man will be sure to be marked with these characteristics; he will have a large mind, a strong conviction, and a firm will.

He must have a large mind to take in, and feel in full force the truths or the impulses which are dimly and dumbly moving in the minds of his fellow-men. This is the necessary condition of his being able to take the lead. A man can only have a real lead by virtue of saying what thousands are thinking but know not how to say; by virtue of doing what thousands are blindly trying but know not how to do. Hence it is that it is the commonest thing in the world to hear great men accused of a want of originality. Anticipations of their most original thoughts are sure to be found here and there in the world before they give them clear utterance. Prophecies of their most striking deeds are sure to be met with, some clearer, some obscurer, all around them and before their days. It cannot be otherwise. The great man is sent not to teach or guide some distant race, some yet unborn society, but the men of his own day. If he cannot do that, it is all the merest chance

whether he will ever guide any one at all. And since all true guidance consists in calling up from within the souls of men the powers that are living and working in the secret abysses of those souls, so the great man's chief work will lie in putting into clear language the secret voices of many minds, in kindling into vigorous activity the secret longings of thousands of hearts. The great man is he who has in him in fuller force that which other men have in weaker force. The little-minded man is swayed to and fro by passions, by hopes, peculiar to himself. In the great man all that is narrow and confined to himself is overpowered by what is large, what is shared and felt by thousands beside. He has room in his heart for many interests, for many impulses, for many aims; and he has that within him that shall comprehend and reconcile them all into one great purpose. Upon this largeness of soul depends in fact the sphere of his greatness. If he is to sway many he must have in him the aspirations and the deeper passions of many; if his sympathies are confined within a narrow range, so also will be his power.

To this large soul he must add deep convictions. For he will be sure to meet with such obstacles as none but leaders ever meet. He will be sure to need the same kind of faith as that which sent martyrs to the stake, and once scattered apostles and missionaries over all the known world. For in spite of saying just what men are secretly thinking of doing, what men's

spirits are driving them to do, the great man will assuredly find that even those whose consciences are compelled to acknowledge him, will often resist him with all the force of prejudice, of interest, of passion. The great man by the very fact of being moved by the deeper impulses of his time will find himself in direct opposition to all the shallower impulses. He will be aiming at that which is to last for centuries; but he will find straight in his path the passing passions of the day, roused to fiercer enmity by their own shallowness. Even when he is following the deep current, which none but himself is deep enough to feel, he will be stemming all the shallower currents which bear on their surface those that are living in his day. Hence it often happens that as long as he lives he sees no signs of success. He works his work; he sows his seed; but he never sees the harvest. He is a leader of men but he never knows it. He has reached a thousand consciences, but he has never met with one that answered to his call. Like Elijah of old, he has been all his life a Prophet of the Desert; he believes that there is no hope left; the people have forsaken the covenant—have thrown down the altars—have slain the prophets; he only is left, and his life is sought to be taken away. He sees not the seven thousand left in Israel, the knees that have not bowed down unto Baal. He sees not Elisha's long labour and final triumph. He is ready to say—'It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life; for I am not better than my fathers.' What

shall carry a man through all this? Nothing but faith. Be the great man a good man or a bad; be he like Elijah, a prophet and a faithful servant; or be he like Balaam, a prophet and a traitor, nothing can carry him through what he must often encounter but a deep conviction of the truth by which he lives; that truth, whatever it may be, of which he is the messenger. It is a fact, and a very awful fact, that the great man may abuse his greatness to mean and selfish aims; but still so much faith he must have as to believe in the truth on which he is borne along, to believe in it when the hearts of other believers waver and the opposition of unbelievers is terribly threatening, or he cannot be great at all. At the bottom of a great man's greatness always lies some insight into truth; not enough, it may be, to make him good as well as great; not enough, it may be, to save him from very wickedness. But by truth, and truth only, can he be great, and corresponding to that truth which he sees must be the strength of the conviction of his soul.

But it is not enough that he should have a deep conviction. Men sometimes fail for want of faith; but they also sometimes fail for want of will to hold that faith when they have got it. To see the truth clearly; to see it in spite of universal clamour against it; in spite of apparently plain proofs of its practical failure; in spite of the denial of wise and profound men, and yet to be too weak to live by it; if this is rare, yet it

is certainly not impossible. And in lesser degree it is extremely common. In choosing how we shall live, we are much more often deficient in strength than in sight. We see our path; but we see all its difficulties and disagreeables, and we are not bold enough to face them. The great man will need, besides a large heart and a deep conviction, a strong will. This is so indispensable a condition of greatness that we frequently fancy that strength of will is almost the whole of greatness, and are prone to admire that beyond all else that we see in a great man. And, indeed, if not the highest element in a great man's nature, it is yet the one which saves the others from downright degradation. What spectacle is more contemptible than clear knowledge combined with weakness? What character is more universally despised than that of a coward? So absolutely necessary is courage to all true service that we have been made by God with a natural admiration even of wicked courage, in order, no doubt, that we should learn early to put on a piece of armour which we cannot do without, and that even nature should assist us in the first element of our spiritual lesson.

Now, if these are the characteristics of true greatness, a large heart, a deep faith, a strong will, is it wonderful that we should have been so framed as to admire them and wish for them, and, in our measure, to imitate them? Is it wonderful that they should be used to make our hearts burn; to fill our imaginations; to colour our

thoughts? These great gifts may be misused; may be fearfully misused. The man who leads others by his deep sympathy with their deeper impulses may turn those impulses to purposes of ambition, of revenge, of rebellion against the God who made them. But for all that the power which he possesses is a power given by God, and in its very errors betrays from what source it came. We need not fear to admire and admire heartily; we need not fear to let the fair beauty of all greatness, of whatever sort, sink into our minds, and widen our thoughts, and give life to our emotions; for all that is noble and excellent can find a place and a work under the Gospel of Christ, and the lesson that we learn from those whom all the world admires may be used in the service of the Lord of truth.

What is the crown that must be added to all these qualities to make the great man true to his own greatness? It is loyalty to his true master. The great man who is simply borne along on the stream of his own large impulses, or again, the great man who uses his greatness for selfish and personal ends, and debases the truth which uplifts him into a ladder for his worldly ambition, he is no doubt still great; but in the real work which he himself is doing he has no abiding interest. He is a tool in the hands of a mightier power, which uses him for the advancement of the truth and will at last cast him away. His greatness is put on him like a garment; it belongs not to his inner spirit.

But the great man who dedicates his greatness to the cause which makes him great, who not only is borne along by the truth which is working in his soul, but surrenders his will and his life to its service, this is the man whose greatness is a part of himself; this is the man whom we honour with more than mere admiration, because he seems to rise above the hero towards the saint.

Whenever we can compare by any chance these two kinds of great men, we feel at once what it is that we really admire in true greatness. We are caught by the brilliant glory which always attends success. We read with delight of one who could force his will to be obeyed in spite of a whole world in arms. We long to share in the triumphs of those who have made themselves illustrious by compelling nations to submit to them, by guiding great questions to great issues, by turning as it were the streams of history this way or that. We follow their career with eagerness and throbbing hearts. We triumph in their success. We are pained when we read of their failure. But is our admiration ever the same in kind as that with which we read of some extraordinary act of self-devotion, some astonishing self-sacrifice? We admire mere success, but the moment we come across stern self-control, calm brave self-sacrifice, generous devotion to a cherished cause, an admiration of mere success seems a vulgar feeling, of which we are half ashamed. Is it possible

in reading Roman history to admire Julius Cæsar in the same sense in which we admire Regulus or Decius? Is it possible in reading of Athens to admire Themistocles in the same sense as we admire Socrates?

That which we really admire in greatness is that which we also admire in the servants of heaven, and great men, even if they are wicked, are still lights to shew us the truth of God. The service of Christ needs heroes and heroism as much as the work of the world. Fill your souls by all means with large-hearted generosity which can find brotherhood with all mankind, with deep convictions which cannot be shaken by the opposition of all the world, with strong will and fixed purpose that shall never fail in stedfast perseverance. And then add to all this the heroism of utter self-sacrifice which knows no other aim than to consecrate all to the Master who gives it, loyally laying at His feet the tribute of loving self-devoted obedience, in answer to His ever-loving and ever-upholding guidance.

SERMON VIII.

FAITH.

HEBREWS xi. 1.

'Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.'

THIS is the only place in the Bible where we have what we can call a definition of Faith. That faith which is the foundation of all other Christian graces—the title by which we keep our place as Christians—the inward working which has its fruit in good works, that is, in our sanctification—the hand by which we lay hold on God and on Christ, is here said to be the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen: and by substance, no doubt, is here meant firm confidence, and by evidence is meant conviction. Faith is the laying hold of the future in the midst of the present, of the unseen in the midst of the seen. It is this which marks the true disciple of Christ, that he walks by faith and not by sight. This faith has taken the place in the Christian mind which was occupied by the Law in the Jewish mind. The religious Hebrew was never tired of singing the praises of

God's Holy Law. We have many Psalms in which the Law of God is exalted above all else; as, for instance, the 19th, where it is compared with the glories of nature, and ranked beyond them in excellence; and we have one Psalm, the longest of all, the 119th, which speaks of nothing else. To have kept the Law is the highest praise a Hebrew could imagine; to have learnt the Law, the surest way to find strength and protection. But St. Paul, when he is not far from death, expresses his confidence in God's mercy to him, by saying, not as a Jew would assuredly have said, 'I have kept Thy Law,' but, 'I have fought a good fight; I have kept the Faith.'

If the world were what it ought to be, there would be little trial of this Faith. But though the world was made very good, and though all that cannot be touched by the influence of our sins is still very good, yet the world, as we have made it, is by no means like the handiwork of God. We see all around us a strange contradiction to what we are told, that justice, and truth, and goodness are the most precious of all things known to man. We see often wrong prevail over right; we see falsehood often successful, and a lie often gains its end; we see the highest honour constantly given to what we know not to be the highest desert; we see mere strength, whether of body or mind, receive the consideration which ought to be reserved for real goodness. It is right to value strength; strength of mind certainly, and, in its proper place, strength of body too; for they are God's gifts, and the

natural inclination which leads us to admire them is His gift also. But we constantly see such gifts as these carrying away a respect out of all proportion to their value. The weak good man, the little one, of whom our Lord says that the angels of such do always behold the face of our Father in Heaven, is thrust aside and despised. How often do we see plain instances of the success of mere rude strength; sometimes of forwardness; sometimes even of cunning and want of strict truth. Even in a society like this it is impossible not to notice it. And in the world outside it is still worse. There injustice is still more often successful, and wickedness still more often unpunished. And even the very laws of nature tell the same tale. Death, as the Book of Ecclesiastes remarks, comes alike to all men. All things come alike to all; there is one event to the righteous and to the wicked; to the clean and to the unclean; to him that sacrificeth and to him that sacrificeth not; as is the good so is the sinner; and he that sweareth as he that feareth an oath.

Nor is this all. Besides this incessant evidence that good does not govern the world, we are perpetually betrayed into the same thought by a traitor within ourselves. At every moment temptation comes; and the temptation is ever close at hand; the evil consequences of yielding seem far away. However much we may be convinced that in the end obedience to duty is better than sin, we find it hard to remember our conviction at the moment that it is wanted. The temptation comes and

makes all things look quite different; and our sure conviction melts away within us, or seems to be hid behind a veil.

But in the midst of all this, in spite of what our eyes perpetually tell us, and in spite of the strange forgetfulness which our inclinations perpetually cast over us, in spite of contradictions without and weakness within, there is a voice from the depths of our own souls that never ceases to repeat that right is really stronger than wrong, and truth is better than falsehood, and justice is surer than injustice. There is a voice which produces no evidence and appeals to no arguments, but with the authority of one who needs neither the one nor the other calls upon us to believe its bare unsupported word, and on that alone to hazard everything if need be, but at any rate to hazard all that sin may have to offer, in the certainty that above, and beyond, and beneath all that exists or can exist is the eternal and unchangeable law of right, and truth, and goodness, and that this law is the real though unseen ruler of the universe, being in fact the will of its Creator. To believe this voice, and to obey it; to surrender to it the guidance of the life in the firm conviction that it will guide us to the true end of our being; to do this is faith.

This trusting to the voices that speak within, even when they flatly contradict the voices that speak without, is obviously not peculiar to Christians. This faith is that which was required in men before a revelation had yet been given; and no doubt this too is what is required in those to whom no revelation has yet been preached. By

this no doubt were those great heathens upheld, whose lives we read with admiration, and take in various ways as examples for our own. They could not be judged by that which they had not received, namely, the precepts of the Bible; but they can and doubtless must be judged by that which is given to them no less than to us, the revelation of natural conscience, bidding them put the unseen above the seen.

But the Jew, and still more the Christian, cannot of course stop here. The faith which is enough for the heathen is not enough for those whom God has expressly called by the preaching of His word. That seed which is implanted in all men alike is required to prove its vitality by its growth when the needful supplies for its growth are given to it. It is no doubt still the substance of things hoped for and the evidence of things not seen, which is required in us as well as in them; but the things hoped for have a new and a fuller meaning, and the things not seen give a brighter and more excellent light.

The Jew had put into his hands the Word of God as far as it was then written. He was put under a system which God had commanded to be observed. Both in one and in the other he found much that was unintelligible, much that seemed either without a purpose or with a purpose not worth pursuit. He found indications of a hidden mystery. He found anticipations of some future revelation, without which his own could not be thoroughly understood. But through all this he could not fail to

recognise the accents of the same authoritative voice which claimed his allegiance from within his own soul. Through all that was strange and dark, and even contradictory, it was impossible not to know in his heart that the Spirit which inspired the Bible was the same Spirit as that which sometimes whispered and sometimes thundered in his own conscience, an authority which he could not awe, and could not influence, entering into the very secrets of his soul, and yet no part of himself, and that this Spirit was the voice of God. To throw himself unreservedly on the power which was thus revealed to him, both from within and from without, to accept with unconditional submission the guidance of that Word of God which was, in fact, the fuller expansion of the message given by conscience, to trust in Him who was thus revealed, in spite of every trial and every temptation; this was the faith of the Jew. Its most perfect utterance is given us by the Prophet whom St. Paul loves to quote—'Although the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither shall the fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls; yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation.'

Their revelation was imperfect. There still remained one question unanswered. The enemy which is hardest for us to encounter is not after all the sight of this world's wrong and injustice; it is not the triumph of evil, or the martyrdom of good, that puts the greatest stumbling-

block in the way of him who fain would walk by faith. It is not when our trials are hardest; nor when our path is beset, if it be beset, with perplexities and darkness; nor when our obedience to God brings trouble on our heads, that we find it most difficult to cling to Him, whom both the Bible and the never-dying voice of conscience still calls our Master. It is when conscience, at the very moment of demanding our obedience, proclaims also our sinfulness. Not the course of the world, but the weakness of ourselves, makes it difficult to trust our lives to that holy guidance which it seems out of our very power to follow. We can attain to the law of the mind, but we find a law in our members warring against the law of our mind, and bringing us into captivity to the law of sin which is in our members. We would believe, and live by our belief, in spite of all the contradictions and evil with which the world is filled: but we are so weak, so wicked, so hampered with the fetters both of nature and of habit. Will that awful voice, whose authority we dare not doubt, really lead us to peace or to our own destruction?

The Gospel gave the answer. We read there of one whose life, and words, and death force us to confess that He is the express image of that Father of whom our own conscience, and the prophets of old, have ever told us. We read of one who laid hold on human nature and made it His own, and consecrated it with a divine power. We read His promises exactly corresponding to that very need which our souls feel every day more keenly. We

read of a power flowing from Him and entering our souls, and surely conquering the very enemy, sin, of whom we are in dread. And all this is written down not merely in words but in the deeds of a history such as never man passed through beside, of a history whose every word touches some feeling of our heart, echoes some whisper of our spirit. He bids us surrender ourselves to Him, follow His leading, trust in His protection, His power; He promises us by sure, though it may be by slow degrees, but with the certainty of absolute assurance, to join us to His Father and to Himself: He promises not merely to undo some day the riddle of the world, and give the good and the just a visible triumph over the evil and the wrong, but, what we need much more, He promises to give us the victory over sin within ourselves, and to prove to us that God has forgiven us by the infallible token of His having cleansed us. He promises not merely that no outward stop shall hinder our reaching the Father Who can satisfy all our wants, but that not even our own sin, dark though it be, shall keep us away from His unchangeable love. To throw ourselves on these promises, to purify ourselves in the full assurance that Christ's love can carry us through all that we shall encounter, to cling to Christ not only in spite of pain and darkness, and strange perplexity, but in spite of our own sins also, this is our substance of things hoped for, this is our evidence of things not seen, this is Christian faith.

This is, St. John tells us in the epistle which was read

this morning, the victory which overcometh the world. This is the power which, both in great things and in small, both in hard trials and in easy, ever supports the disciple of Christ by bringing within his reach all the strength of his Master. And no doubt we see its virtue most plainly in those great crises of life when our cause seems to involve a choice between heaven and hell. The eleventh chapter of the epistle to the Hebrews, from which my text is taken, sets before us a series of glorious examples, who once proved the strength of their faith by the victories which that faith enabled them to win. But though these may be the most glorious, these are not the most precious victories of Christian faith. To resist some trivial temptation, to tell the truth when fear or nervousness has almost betrayed the tongue into falsehood; to turn away the eye from what might provoke a wrong thought; to fasten the attention down by force to some unpleasant labour because it is a duty; to oppose a steadfast resistance to a frequently recurring inclination to evil, and not to be wearied out, even when the inclination seems never to be completely killed; these are victories which are not held up for human admiration, no, not even in the pages of the Bible; not because they fall below admiration, but because they rise above it, and can only receive their fit reward from Him Who seeth in secret.

And that reward they will surely have. This faith, which, resting on the certainty of Christ's help and striving to hold fast His Spirit, lives in us throughout our daily

life, and secretly influences our works and deeds and thoughts, will gradually build up within the soul a temple to the Lord, not of hay, wood, stubble, but of gold, silver, precious stones, a calm, firm, pure character, knit to our Redeemer by the hidden bonds of a Christian purpose, at peace with God, and master of itself. The final victory indeed which enables a man to say as St. Paul said, 'I have kept the faith,' is a gift which God alone bestows, and we never know when He may see fit to bestow it upon us; or how long it may be before the sense of struggle with ourselves shall pass away, and peace shall fill our hearts. But soon or late we know that we shall win if we hold fast our faith, for God has promised and we believe His word.

SERMON IX.

DOUBTS.

ST. JOHN XX. 29.

'Jesus saith unto him, Thomas, because thou hast seen Me thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen and yet have believed.'

THE unbelief of St. Thomas, and the way in which our Lord treated it, are full of lessons of deep interest to every Christian, of peculiar interest to us here at Rugby, because of the impression which the narrative made on the mind of Arnold. St. Thomas is a type of very many Christian minds, and the reception which his doubts met with has been at once an instruction and a comfort to all of them. This Sunday * seems a natural occasion for recalling the record to our memory and reflecting on it, because it was, as it were, on this Sunday that these doubts were set at rest. It was on the evening of Easter Sunday that our Lord came in, as we read in the Gospel of this morning, and gave His peace to the disciples as they were assembled in a private meeting.

* Sunday after Easter.

And it was on the Sunday after, that is the first Sunday after Easter, that He came in once more and said to Thomas, 'Reach hither thy finger and behold My hands, and reach hither thy hand and thrust it into My side; and be not faithless but believing.' Then Thomas answered and said unto Him, 'My Lord and my God.' Jesus saith unto him, 'Thomas, because thou hast seen Me thou hast believed; blessed are they that have not seen and yet have believed.'

Now, I wish you to observe in the first place what Thomas had done. He had doubted. He had not disbelieved; he had only refused to believe. It is impossible, in reading this narrative, to identify the doubt of St. Thomas with the disbelief of those Jews who demanded a sign from heaven. He evidently wished to believe if he could; they evidently did not. He was a warm-hearted generous man, ready, as he had shewn once before, to die, if need were, for his master's service. When our Lord proposed to go into Judea at a time at which the Jews were ready to murder Him, in order that He might awake Lazarus out of sleep, St. Thomas was the first to say, 'Let us go also that we may die with Him.' But though St. Thomas was not wanting in devotion, his faith was slow. He could not believe without very clear proof. Once before he had shewn this. When our Lord had said, 'Whither I go ye know, and the way ye know:' St. Thomas had replied, 'Lord, we know not whither Thou goest, and how can we know

the way?' In fact, he would have everything made quite distinct and unmistakeable. And so on this occasion he was not satisfied with the evidence of the ten other Apostles and of the women; he was not sure that he could rely on their inability to be misled; he must have overwhelming evidence or he would not believe. It was not the wilfulness of one hardened in his own theory which he would not quit; nor yet of one who could not bear to accept a truth which would unsettle his life. It was honest doubt; such doubt as naturally grew out of his state of mind.

And how then was it treated? Our Lord does not treat it as a sin. There is not the slightest trace of fault-finding in what our Lord says to him. He only tells him that his is not the most blessed state. The most blessed state is that of those who can believe without such proof as this. There are such minds. There are minds to whom the inward proof is everything. They believe not on the evidence of their senses or of their mere reason, but on that of their consciences and hearts. Their spirits within them are so attuned to the truth that the moment it is presented to them they accept it at once. And this is certainly far the higher state—the more blessed—the more heavenly. I do not mean that such believers never are mistaken Quite the contrary; they are very often mistaken, and accept a great deal which has no foundation at all, because their faith does not stop to separate the chaff from the grain. But they are not

mistaken in the substantial thing. The form of words in which their faith has clothed itself may not be defensible. The particular history which they have made a part of their belief may not be quite accurate. But the inner power of what they hold is God's truth, and knits their souls to God. And so they are in a higher and a more heavenly state than their slower brethren who, while they are obliged to wait for a fuller proof of some historical fact, or some revelation from God, have to wait also for the doctrine which that fact has to teach. St. Thomas was slow to believe our Lord's resurrection; and, of course, that slowness would delay also his full belief in his own resurrection hereafter, and in all the consequences that are to follow on it; it would take off the keenness of his sense that we are in God's hands, and that God our Father is making all things, even such fearful things as the death of Christ must then have seemed, work together for good: it would keep a barrier standing between himself and his Master, Who seemed to him to be absolutely taken away from him. St. Thomas most assuredly had not attained the blessedness of those whose souls were ready to accept the resurrection at once. But still his doubt was not a sinful doubt, or it would have been met, as the disbelief of the Jewish rulers was met: 'An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign, and there shall no sign be given to it but the sign of the Prophet Jonas.'

This was not the way in which our Lord dealt with His

loving but honest disciple. The proof that he asked for was given him. He asked to have his senses convinced, and his senses were convinced. He had not asked anything presumptuous; he had not asked for any miracle. He asked for the same evidence that had already been given to others, and which he might fairly suppose was within his reach. And he got it. The coming of our Lord is told as if indeed it were expressly for St. Thomas's sake. He came in and directly addressed Himself to him. He reminded him of the very words that he had used. He offered him the very proof that he had wanted. And St. Thomas's words express, if anything could express, the fulness of the deepest conviction; the fulness of a faith that could never again be shaken, because it had reached down to the very central truth of the fact before his eyes. He saw our Lord and he knew that not only was He that Jesus, the Son of Man, with Whom he had lived, and to Whose teaching he had listened for some years past, but that He was indeed his Lord and his God—the Lord of Life and the Conqueror of Death.

St. Thomas's doubt is a type and his character an example of what is common among Christians. There are some indeed who are never troubled with doubts at all. They live so heavenly a life that doubts and perplexities fall off their minds without fastening. They find enough in their faith to feed their spiritual life. They do not need to inquire into the foundations of

their belief. They are inspired by a power within their hearts. The heavenly side of all truths is so clear to them that any doubts about the human form of it are either unintelligible, or else at once rejected, or else disregarded as unimportant. But that is not always the case. There are very many who are startled at times by strange perplexities. Doubts arise in their minds, or are suggested by others, about doctrines which they have always taken for granted, or about facts connected with those doctrines. Perplexities trouble them in reading the Bible. They cannot understand, or, perhaps, they feel that they can understand and cannot accept. And these doubts and perplexities belong to no age and no class. Even when very young we are liable to strange feelings of wonder; and we never grow too old not to be liable to be startled if what we have never before examined is called in question. I can remember when I was quite a child wondering and feeling perplexed at the imprecations in the Psalms. I have no doubt that others have felt other perplexities. And greater experience, and greater reading, and intercourse with others who really think on such subjects, and are unable to merely acquiesce in what they have learnt, all this does not make doubting or perplexity impossible, but quite the contrary. What shall we do with these difficulties when they arise?

In the first place let us not permit them to shake our hold of God and of conscience. However far our doubts

may go, they cannot root up from within us, without our own consent, the power which claims to guide our lives with supreme authority. They cannot obliterate from within us the sense of right and wrong, and of the everlasting difference between them. They cannot silence, unless we join in silencing, the voice that bids us believe, that in spite of all that can be said, or seen, or felt, the law of right is the eternal foundation on which all things are built. By this a man may yet live if he have nothing else to live by, and God will assuredly give him more in His own good time.

But yet, again, let us not treat such doubts as sins, which they are not, but as perplexities, which they are. As we must not quit our hold on God, so do not let us fancy that God has quitted His hold on us. To fancy that every doubt is of itself a sin, is altogether to mistake God's love and mercy. Rather let us endeavour to see why such doubts are sent. Doubts are, in many cases, the birth-pangs of clearer light. They are the means by which we grow in knowledge, even in knowledge of heavenly things. Better far, no doubt, to grow in knowledge by quiet steady increase of light, without these intervals of darkness and difficulty. But that is not granted to all. Many men, perhaps most men, have to grow by often doubting and by having their doubts cleared up. In that way only is the chaff separated from the grain, and the pure truth at last presented to their minds. In that way are prejudices, false notions, frivo-

lities shaken off from the substantial truth, and they are blessed with the fulness of the knowledge of God. These doubts are often the fiery trial which burns up any wood, hay, or stubble which we may have erected in our souls, and leaves space for us to build gold, silver, precious stones. They are in fact as much the messengers of God's Providence as any other voices that reach us. They may distress us, but they cannot destroy us, for we are in the hands of God. They may hide God's face from us, but they cannot stop the flow of His love; for He is our Father, and Christ hath redeemed us.

Yet once more in all such cases remember St. Thomas, and feel sure that what is wanting Christ will give. He does not require you to say that you believe what you do not believe; for that would be dishonest. He does not require you to force yourself to believe by an act of your will; for that would be only self-deception, and nothing could justify that. You are not called on to believe till you are fully able to do so; but you are called on to trust. To trust is in your power. To resign yourself lovingly to God in the full confidence that His love will do all that you can need, and that out of darkness He will be sure to bring light; to walk to the uttermost of your power by the light that you already have; to hold fast by God's hand, and to trust the promises that He whispers in your conscience; that you can do, and that you ought to do.

But are there no other doubts but these? Are there

no such things as sinful doubts which cannot expect enlightenment? Assuredly there are. Doubts may come from mere levity of mind which will not see the deep truths revealed within the soul; doubts may come from conceit, delighting to find something new and different from the rest of the world; doubts may come from a hard heart which has been warned by conscience of its sinful state, and cannot bear to admit the reality of a truth which imperatively demands a change of life; doubts may be like those of the Pharisees who were resolute not to believe, and only asked for proofs that they might have something to attack. Such doubts are fearful sins, and as we indulge them we know that they are sins.

Moreover, doubts which come of themselves, and are not sinful at all, we may make into sins; by being irreverent in dealing with them; by suggesting them lightly and wantonly to others; by finding pleasure in entertaining them; by fastening our hearts to them, till we are unwilling to give them up, even when we have full evidence that they are groundless.

Such doubts are sinful: of such we must beware, as we would beware of any sin accompanied by peculiar danger. But the natural doubts that come unbidden, and demand to be heard, are not sins at all, and we must not treat them as sins. One word will tell our duty in dealing with them all: Wait: wait in full trust that God will give you light as you want it; will teach you what

is needed for your soul's health by ways of His own; will make clear at last what part of your doubt was a mere mistake, what part was well founded; above all, will make the very doubt of the loving soul the foundation of a faith that can never more be shaken. Can we suppose that to the end of his days St. Thomas ever needed again any arguments to convince him of our Lord's having risen from the grave, or that he would ever forget the thrilling moment when his hand touched his Master's wounded side? So, too, the Christian finds in the perplexities that God clears up a light even beyond the brightness of his earlier faith, for it is the light of the Face of Christ.

SERMON X.

SCRUPLES.

ROMANS xiv. 5.

'*Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind.*'

WE are all liable at various times to be troubled with perplexities about our duty, not because we find it hard or unpleasant, but because we cannot clearly see our way. And this perplexity sometimes amounts to something like darkness, and causes much fear. It is sometimes a doubt about the past, whether we have done right; and sometimes about the present, whether we are in the right way; and sometimes about the future, what we are henceforward to do. It sometimes embraces our amusements, making us doubt how far they are lawful; and sometimes it extends to our more serious employments, making us doubt whether they are really God's service, and if they be plainly a part of His service, making us doubt whether we are discharging them in a right spirit. Perplexity of this kind is not perhaps very common at any one moment. There may not be more than a very few who suffer from

it at one time. But we are all liable to it, and few altogether escape it at some period or other of their lives, and some, from natural disposition, are much haunted by it, and find it a sore trial. Such questions as these will occur at some time or other of their lives to most men: Is it right in me to give so much of my time to mere amusement? Is it right, considering how fearfully dangerous this world is said to be, that I should allow myself any amusement at all? Is it right that so very small a portion of my thoughts should be about God and about my own soul? Is it right to spend so much money on myself? Is it right to allow any personal aims, ambition, for instance, or love of distinction, to enter into my plans, and prospects, and hopes in life? Is it right to spend so much time on what is not directly religious? These and a thousand similar questions will arise, and will trouble us sometimes much. And not only general questions like these, but minute questions about trifling acts of conduct; distress about sins which, however sinful, yet are not to be mended by such mere weak distress; doubts about feelings which can never be brought to any definite test; these are sometimes added to our burden, and at times may prove a very painful addition.

Now all such scruples and perplexities as these must be judged, as all other things must be judged, by their purpose, and how they fulfil that purpose. They are sent, or they are permitted to come, it matters not which, by God. And it is intended that with these, as with all other

opportunities that come in our way we should fulfil some end which God would have fulfilled. And their purpose is too plain to be mistaken for a moment.

We are all very apt to sink down into a foolish, and sometimes even a sinful, acquiescence in what we find going on all around us, in what we find settled and customary. We are apt to acquiesce in whatever is customary very often to a very dangerous degree, until our consciences are positively blunted. If it is the custom to indulge in language such as no Christian could approve; if it is the custom to be not quite upright in our dealings; if it is the custom to prefer private interests and selfish wishes to the public good; if it is the custom to think very lightly of particular sins; we are very apt indeed to fall into the stream, and defend ourselves by saying, that we do as others do. Thus every profession, every country, every class of society, gradually forms a code of religion and morality peculiar to itself, and very often extremely different from God's code. Each of these little circles is keen enough to find out the flaws in the code of the others; but very blind indeed to the flaws in its own. The gentleman is quite shocked at the practices which are common in trade, while he thinks very lightly of horrible sins which are common in his own class. The tradesman is indignant at what gentlemen will do, but smiles at things which he does himself. So too the physician, so too the lawyer, so too the clergyman, is very liable to form a professional code. Families often seem

to have a code of their own, and each is shocked in turn at what passes unquestioned in others. And so, too, the whole of society, at different times, settles down into a code of its own, and applauds this, and tolerates that, for reasons quite peculiar to itself. These special codes are inevitable, but they are very dangerous, and if allowed to harden quite unquestioned, would end with subverting all rules of right whatever, and reducing both religion and morality to a sort of honour among thieves. That which prevents this, and perpetually breaks up the gathering crust, is the never-ceasing restlessness of our consciences, demanding to be satisfied upon a thousand points, great and small, and sometimes giving extreme pain, until the demand be satisfied. I do not mean that these special codes are in all cases wrong. They are very often quite right, in spite of not seeming so at first. They are very often no more than the summing up of the voices of many generations of religious men. They are very often the best settlement of a dispute which has lasted quite long enough, and has been decided as well as human intellects can decide it. But for all that, our consciences are quite right in stirring us up to examine for ourselves whether the decision is right or not. Even granted that the decision is right, still we ought to obey it, because it is right, not because society has so decided it; and for that reason we ought to examine whether or not it really is right. The same spirit which leads a man to acquiesce in what is right, simply because he finds it an established

thing, would of course lead him to acquiesce in what is wrong, for the same reason. The restlessness and scrupulousness which is perpetually starting doubts and difficulties, and sometimes giving us much distress, prevents a man from giving a wrong allegiance to a power which has no right to claim more than a conditional and qualified submission, the legislative power of ordinary society. We ought not to be quite contented until, in the words of the text, we are fully satisfied in our own minds. Now, since this is plainly the use of these doubts and scruples both about ourselves and about the society in which we live, we are always bound to ask about them all, whether they are really doing that for which they come. For there can be no doubt that great and noble as the faculty of conscience is, we may pervert it and misuse it, if we allow it to waste on trifles and useless details the energies which ought to be spent in filling our minds with great living principles.

The first point always is—the first, I say, because the easiest to judge of—whether these doubts and scruples are enabling us to do our ordinary duties better than before; whether they are strengthening or weakening us for the business of life; whether they act as a stimulus to do well what we are sure to be right. For very often they have just the contrary effect; they make us neglect important matters for our own fancies; they make us neglect the comfort, or even the happiness of others, while we are pausing to settle some difficult matter of

practice which, at the best, has little effect whichever way it be settled. Now, it is quite certain that we are sent into the world to be a blessing to our fellow-men; to contribute, to the utmost of our power, to their comfort and well-being; and not to weigh minute points of casuistry. And if the latter interferes with the former, there need not be a moment's hesitation; we must decide such doubts instantly as they arise and turn our minds from the subject; this is just one of those cases not at all uncommon in life, when a delayed decision, even if right at last, is a great deal worse that a wrong decision at the moment. If such difficulties stand between us and our duties we must simply settle them at once and dismiss them, and resolutely refuse to re-open them.

Scruples and difficulties which come in the way of duty are of the wrong kind; they are perversions of conscience; and they require a satisfaction which we have no right to ask. Very often they ask to have settled by reason what really is a matter of feeling. Very often they ask to be blessed with feelings which God chooses to give or withhold at His own pleasure, and which we cannot demand at our pleasure. The time is spent in lamenting past sins which ought to be spent in attending to present duties; the heart is given up to fears which ought to be given up to God; weak regret takes the place of vigorous resolution: longings for a sense of God's presence, or for a sense of our own love, fill up our souls when we ought to be proving our love by the proof which He

has named, that is keeping His commandments. All such scruples and such inward difficulties are not healthy, and to indulge them is not right.

The second point for consideration is not merely whether these inward questionings, these

> Blank misgivings of a creature,
> Moving about in worlds not realized,

elevate the general tone of our minds, not merely for the discharge of immediate duties, but for the formation of nobler and higher purposes in life; whether they fill us with loftier and purer aims, with a more unselfish and heavenly ambition; whether they strengthen our determination that whatever work in the course of God's providence it falls to us to do, shall be well and manfully done. Unless this be the case these self-questionings are simply of no use whatever. There were no men in the whole of the world's history who devoted themselves more entirely to questions of this sort than the Jewish Pharisees. And it ended in their case with the grossest and worst hypocrisy. It ended with tithing mint, and anise, and cummin, and neglecting mercy, and judgment, and truth. It ended with an endless tangle of subtle distinctions perilous to the souls of those who ventured among them. And why? Because they drove the enquiries of their consciences in the wrong direction. They enquired not for the sake of God, but for the sake of themselves. They sought not for a means of bringing

them nearer to their Maker, but for a plan by which they could finish, and fill up, and round off the pattern of life which they had sketched for themselves. They wanted, not to serve God and man, but to gratify the petty pride of having done exactly what they had to do; a pardonable feeling in mere trifles, a mischievous feeling when it goes beyond trifles, and downright ruin when it takes possession of the whole life. Something of the same sort is very possible still. And the only way to avoid it is, always to press the gaze of our consciences towards God and God's will, rather than towards ourselves.

For we must never forget that however much we may be disturbed by questions and perplexities, we are responsible through it all. It will be vain to plead before our Judge, 'I did not endeavour to fulfil Thy will because my heart was torn by doubts and my mind clouded with difficulties.' He will assuredly answer, 'Those doubts and difficulties were My messengers sent for a purpose of My own. You and not they were made responsible for your own life. What have you done with it?'

The more we inquire into all questions of duty and of right; the more we examine into all the rules and practices of society, in order to understand them and maintain them if they are good, and to do our part in our proper place and degree in setting them right where they are not good; the more we seek to recognise the difference between the seen and the unseen, between the conventional rules of social life and the living laws of

God, between the artificial distinctions of classes and the real distinctions of Christian gifts; the more we bring every action, and every thought, and still more every habit of our own to the standard of God's will, the better; provided always that in so doing we do not sacrifice the very end of so doing, namely, the better discharge of daily duty, and the godlier tone of purpose and of mind. Misgivings, and doubts, and scruples are intended to make us think, but not to make us waste all our energy on thinking; they are intended to make us pause, but not to make us stop; they are intended to make us repent, but not to make us give up everything else to fruitless sorrow. And if we cannot attain peace or light all at once, we must not for all that complain, lag, or despair; we must simply obey and wait. For we may be sure that God hath not called us to bondage and fear, but to the adoption of children whereby we have a right to say, Abba Father.

SERMON XI.

CHARACTER OF GOD'S LAW.

ROMANS vii. 12.

'*Wherefore the Law is holy, and the Commandment holy, and just, and good.*'

It would certainly be a mistake to attribute to St. Paul anything like a formed philosophical system. There is no trace in his writings of what we should call a system of doctrine; he taught from the fulness of a full heart, and precise formulæ had not yet been rendered necessary by errors or false teaching. The spirit of his teaching is to him so much more than the form of it, that he seems to disregard the form altogether. But a man possessed with his subject will often express himself in precisely accurate language without intending it. And still more likely will this be in the case of one to whom God's truth has been directly revealed, and who describes what has been shewn him. Even when there is no demand on him for logical precision, he will often be logically precise simply because he sees the whole truth, and tells exactly what he sees.

The three epithets by which St. Paul characterises the commandment or government of God appear to be an instance of this. There is certainly no need for the argument of the context that these epithets should be exhaustive. But when examined they appear to be so. It would be impossible to find three characteristics which more fully describe God's supreme Law, the rule by which all things are made and governed, than these three, holy, good, and just.

These three characteristics are, in fact, the aspects under which, and under which alone, the Law of God is revealed to men, such as men are. What may be the fitting description of that Law, as seen by God Himself, we cannot say; but when we have called it holy, good, and just, we have precisely defined its relations to ourselves.

We are compound beings, and our fall has made us conscious of the fact. We have within us a higher nature which is ever drawing us away from earth and earthly enjoyment; bidding us live not for this life but for immortality; bidding us take as the law of our action, a law which shall last through all eternity; bidding us unite ourselves with the inhabitants of heaven; bidding us reduce all our earthly and animal impulses and aims to absolute subjection to a higher purpose. Such a purpose we call a holy purpose; such a life, if we could but attain to it, we call a holy life. The Law which corresponds to this higher nature we call a holy

Law. The Law is holy, because it is perpetually calling on this part of our souls to rule our lives with absolute supremacy; because it is perpetually demanding the expulsion of every thought and imagination which can sully or weaken this Divine gift. To be untrue, to be impure, to be selfish, to be frivolous, are inconsistent with this holiness of the Law. For the holiness of the Law requires that all who know the Law shall be holy like itself.

Again, we have also a lower nature; not necessarily evil, but yet distinctly belonging to a lower rank in God's creation. We have appetites and passions of various kinds perpetually demanding to be gratified, and plainly meant to be gratified. We have bodily impulses and social impulses, which lead us to seek for appropriate pleasures. And when we look out of ourselves we find that God's creation is full of everything that can meet the wants of this lower nature. The universe abounds with pleasures, and no created thing that is capable of pleasure is found to be out of all reach of the pleasures of which it is capable. And if we turn from nature to revelation, we find, running through the Bible, from one end to another, a tenderness, a fulness of love, a recognition of human feeling, an adaptation to every variety of human need, which indicate that the pleasures scattered through the creation are not intended for our trial but for our enjoyment. Nor is this all. The Bible teaches what our experience of life could

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not teach perhaps, but abundantly confirms, that even what seems to contradict this love and this tenderness, is but a further proof of it. Even the very pains which we have to bear still are meant for our happiness, and will work for our good. All things work together for good to them that love God. Trouble and anxiety, and bodily pain, and keen disappointment, which would seem to prove that our happiness is counted for nothing, yet rightly understood are discovered to be means towards that very happiness. Thus the Law of God, while it calls on all men to be holy, provides also that all shall be happy. And it is this that we call the goodness of the Law.

Goodness does not sit on so high, so awful a throne as holiness. We reverence what is holy: we love what is good. But goodness, if not so high, is larger. It takes in not men only, but all living creatures. It lays hold not of our conscience only, but of all our humanity. It speaks not only in the whispers of the spirit, but through every faculty of our being. It enters into our souls by a thousand entrances. It surrounds us with its own atmosphere. It draws us with cords—yea, even with the cords of a man. And weak and sinful as we are, it still follows us into our weakness and our sin, and, taking the form of mercy, it speaks of hope to the despairing, of healing to the wounded, of peace to those that are haunted by remorse, of the promise made to the thief on the Cross, and of the welcome given to the prodigal son.

Were we perfect according to our degree, I do not see how we should have any distinct perception of any other characteristic of God's Law than these two. They would exhaust our whole nature. But we have fallen, and, in consequence of that fall, the two parts of our being meant to be in harmony are perpetually at strife. Happiness and holiness are not always identical. The demands of our higher and our lower nature do not always agree. The lower nature is rebellious, and often misuses that very goodness which has so abundantly provided for its needs and its desires, to procure immediate enjoyment at the expense of conscience. We forget the requirement to be holy in the attempt to be happy. And this discord must not be. And so the Law assumes a third face, and declares itself to be just; and by virtue of its justice, it ever apportions the happiness to the holiness, and the pain to the sin. By an eternal decree the one is linked to the other. Happiness and holiness cannot be parted; neither can punishment and guilt.

Now it is plain that the revelation of the Law is made to assist us in copying the pattern which is there set before us. Let me describe to you the defect of character which is the natural consequence of not being fully impressed with each one of these three characteristics of God's government of His creation.

A man may be deficient in a sense of the holiness of the Law. Of course he who does not feel the

holiness of the Law will not fully feel its goodness, still less its justice. Holiness, goodness, and justice are not three distinct things, but three different sides of the same thing. But it is quite possible for a man to lose the due proportion between the three, and in so doing to lower them all, and yet to retain one much more clearly before him than the other two. So a man may still have a strong though not so true a sense of the goodness of God's rule, though he has very much lost sight of its holiness. The defect of such a man's character is a tendency to be earthly: not always to be worldly, but to be earthly. To have his hopes, his aims, his labours bounded by this present life; to lose all hold of the heavenly, unearthly side of religion; to be much more moral than devotional; to cut out all his duties by an earthly pattern; to be over-particular in demanding that everything that he does shall have a use, and to forget that in very many cases the highest use of a good deed is the doing of it. A man of this sort is tempted to call all unearthly tendencies fanatical. He is content with the world as he finds it. He has no aspirations; no longings to be ever purer, ever more unselfish, ever truer. The outer life is more to him than the inner. Sins of thought, unless they are very gross, seem to him of little consequence unless they lead to sins of act. He wishes to do what is right; but he has no desire to be ever more and more a child of God. This is the form which this character takes if

the man have lived a very decent and well-conducted life. If, however, he has fallen into gross outward sins at any time, he is ever after more taken up with keeping himself out of these sins than with striving to attain to a purer air of life. He relies on God's love; he longs for forgiveness; he clings to his Saviour; but while he longs for forgiveness, he thinks little of cleansing. He feels the pain of not being reconciled to his God; but he has little sense of the pollution which sin leaves behind in the soul. He does not realise to himself the impossibility of bringing a defiled soul into the presence of God. This defect of character admits, of course, of many degrees. But it is plain that such a man is not fashioned on the highest type. His service may be genuine as far as it goes, but it is imperfect; not only as all human service is imperfect, in the execution, but imperfect in the very conception and idea.

Again, a man may not have a strong sense of the goodness of God's Law. Such a man, of course, has but a poor and narrow idea of holiness. But still he may have much more sense of that than of God's goodness. The danger in this case is a tendency either to narrowness, or to worse than narrowness, hardness. Such a man cannot find anything here in this life which at all falls in with his narrow creed. He not merely recognises the unearthly character of true religion, but he recognises no other. The pleasures provided in this

life, even the beauties which abound on every side of us, seem to him to be intended for mere trials. He is grateful to God; but he is grateful for one thing, and for one thing only, that is for spiritual blessings. He shuts himself out from much that is tender, much that touches the heart, much that softens and blesses, because he will not open his senses to receive the gifts of his Maker. Such a man is often undeniably religious; so religious that he does harm to weaker men by making them identify religion with his narrowness of mind; so religious that he makes many mourn that he will shut them out from himself, and rob them of the aid which all Christians ought to get from the presence of a good man among them. But narrowness of this sort may go further. A man who strives to live by the law of holiness without the help of the law of goodness, finds that he cannot do it. If he is very humble this will merely make him strive the harder. But there is a danger, and a very real danger, lest when he finds that he cannot raise himself up to the level of this unearthly life, he will pull that level down to him, and so lower his standard of holiness itself.

Lastly, a man may be wanting in a sense of the justice of God's government. And perhaps for us imperfect creatures this is the most dangerous deficiency of all. Such an one generally shews his want by a weak desire to bury the past. When he has done a very real wrong he wishes to be forgiven, and have done with it, and

commence afresh, exactly as if nothing had happened. He has no sense of a sin once done being a substantive thing tied inevitably to substantive consequences. And for this very reason he cannot feel any need for a Redeemer or a redemption. That he should need anything to be done for him, to enable him to stand in the dread judgment of God, is never strongly present to his soul. He can see something of the beauty of holiness; he can feel attracted by the goodness which never deserts even the most sinful creature. But he sees only one side of either of these. The holiness which condemns every sinful act with an irrevocable brand, a brand which only Almighty Power can remove, and that only by a mysterious atonement, the true nature of which the angels of heaven cannot fathom to the bottom; this holiness he does not understand. The goodness which pursues the sinner into the last recesses of sin with the offer of the life-blood of the Son of God, and yet is so absolutely checked by a higher law that it will never tolerate a single unforsaken sin; this goodness he cannot understand. For to see these is to see the justice in which they are comprised. Hence he passes his life, as long as he has any religious life at all, in vain attempts to do what cannot be done; to cleanse his heart by forgetting its defilement, or at the best by a weak sorrow. And so he never comes with a full acknowledgment of his guilt to the foot of the Cross, resigning soul and body to Him Who alone can cleanse.

These three then are the characters of the law which is to guide our life. By these we must form our own characters. It has not always so direct and immediate an effect upon our lives to contemplate in this way the features of God's truth, as to think of special faults which we are in danger of committing, or of special graces which we have need to seek for. But such truths as these if they sink into our hearts will not the less bear fruit, if not immediately, yet long after. And through them we are the better able to rise towards the contemplation of that one character, in whom all this is fulfilled, not in words, but in fact, Him who reveals to us not God's Law only, but God's Person, the Son of God, the Man Christ Jesus.

SERMON XII.

ORIGINAL SIN.

ROMANS vii. 20.

'Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me.'

WHAT do we mean by Original Sin? We mean to say that sin is not something which has penetrated into our nature from the outside; that it is not a garment thrown over our shoulders, which may therefore be stripped off like a garment; that it is not the mere result of evil example, or of any external influences whatever; that it is not learnt like a lesson of evil, nor caught like an infectious disease. It is a part of our very selves. It has its springs in the very sources of our being. It mingles its poison with the very first beginnings of our life, whether spiritual or natural. It cannot be cast off. It cannot be torn up by the roots. It cannot be treated by any medicine which discipline, or education, or example can supply. Penetrate into a man as deep as you will, and you cannot reach its origin; drill him almost into a machine, and you will

not kill the life of this fatal power. Nay, it sometimes seems as if, by long drilling, you might kill everything else: kill affection, and stifle impulse, and dry up the imagination, and convert the reason itself into a mere engine for producing arguments at need; and yet you will not kill the inborn spirit of evil; some day, by some accident, it is roused to unusual violence, and bursts through all fetters, and reasserts its independence as the last, but in this world imperishable, token of humanity.

This is what we mean by Original Sin. The source of this is another and a different question, which we need not mix up with this. It may be not merely an interesting, but even sometimes and to some minds a very profitable study to examine in what sense this mysterious infection is connected with the history told us of our first parents in the Garden of Eden. But this is not the part of the doctrine of which I would now speak. The essential point for us is, not how the sin came, but the fact that it is there. There, deep within, rooted in that spiritual nature whose issues we behold when we look into our souls, but whose hidden substance God only sees,—there, in the invisible, inscrutable depths of our being, is the power of Original Sin.

It is this on which ultimately rests the doctrine of justification by faith. When we say that we are justified by faith, and not by works, we mean that the power which is to bring us to God is not any human device, however excellent or however useful; it is not instruc-

tion, or example, or exhortation, or education, though all these have their part to play; it is not anything that is to act upon our outer conduct, or that is to reach us through our senses; it is the direct influence of God and of God only. By faith as opposed to works, is meant the inside as opposed to the outside, the spirit as opposed to the letter, the heart and conscience as opposed to a system of rules and of discipline, the gift of God as opposed to the work of man. These various influences which act upon us from without are excellent in their place. They are, we may say, the work of the husbandman on the soil. But they are all in vain unless the seed have life in itself. No work of the husbandman can make dead seed grow; and so no work of man can make a soul which had not God's grace into a servant or a child of God. There is one power, and one only, which can lay hands on the enemy with whom we are contending; and that power is the power that first made the soul itself. He who stands as it were behind the secret fountains from which our being issues, He and He alone can deal with this awful disease by which we are all afflicted; He and He alone can attack sin in the very citadel of its dominion, and win the victory which we could never win. Our justification must come from Him, and therefore must begin with that which He puts into us, that movement of the heart and conscience, which we call faith; and cannot come from man nor begin with what man can do for us, that is the regulation

and discipline of our habits and our deeds, which is what is meant by works. The regulation of the deeds is excellent, but it is still absolutely and always subordinate. The real power which knits us to God and to Christ, which enables us either quickly or by slow degrees to purify our hearts, which makes us victorious over trials and temptations, is not man's training but God's inspiration; for God, and God only, can lay His hand on the origin and source of our weakness. Man may do much in his appointed way; he may discipline the life so as to break the force of many temptations; he may evoke from within what God hath planted; he may cherish and foster those gifts and graces which God hath given; but the work of redemption must still be really God's work and not man's; for God and not man can help us against such an enemy as the sin which is in our nature.

What, then, are the lessons of life which we have to deduce from this doctrine? First, of course, there is that dependence upon God's help, which we can never too often repeat to our hearts as our only stay. We have to learn not merely as an abstract truth but as a living fact, as a principle which will check and control and yet uphold our hearts throughout the day, that we are in God's hands and not our own. We are not the real combatants in the great battle; rather our souls are the battle-field, and Christ and sin fight there for supremacy, and we can but surrender ourselves to one of these two. We are weak and helpless, except

inasmuch as God may help us. It is by no means easy to feel this, however easy it may be to see it. It is by no means easy to arrive at that absolute consciousness of our weakness which makes us little children. And many, perhaps most, Christians have to learn it by a very painful experience, by the experience of repeatedly falling into sin, until it has been as it were branded into us that our strength is absolutely nothing. Most men, I say, have to learn the lesson so, because they will not and cannot learn it otherwise. But plainly we ought to learn it by impressing it upon our consciences, by habitually distrusting ourselves, by habitually guarding against everything like boasting, above all, by a habit of walking through the world with a consciousness that God is looking on us and willing to lead us. And if we would ask what are the tokens of our having learnt the lesson, the answer is, that besides the quiet trust in God, (about which each must judge for himself,) the chief token of our having learnt to lean on God and not on ourselves, is the avoidance of all unnecessary temptation. The man who goes into temptation in the way of duty may well feel certain that God will help him; for he may well feel that God sent him, and that He who sent will also protect. But any one who goes into temptation without any need cannot feel this. He must rely, if he relies on anything, on his own strength. And so he proves that he has not yet learnt the truth — that his own strength is a prop rotten at the foot, and incapable of

upholding him in any real trial. The humble Christian —humbled by many defeats if not by the teaching of the Bible—will so distrust himself that his life is constantly, though secretly, checked by the same thought which he expresses in the prayer, 'Lead us not into temptation.' He will avoid what he has found dangerous or hurtful. He will turn away his steps from the road which is convenient for doing wrong; his hands from the book which has before now overcome his resolution; his eyes from the picture or the scenes which assail his purity. For he knows that his enemy is one that he cannot master, and he will therefore go nowhere unless Christ will go with him.

But, secondly, as on the one hand we learn this absolute dependence on God, so do we learn a great comfort in our Christian warfare. We learn that there is a sense in which we can, like the Apostle, disclaim our own faults, and say as he did, 'It is not I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me.' No doubt there may be here a great danger of abuse. There may be great danger that we shall lightly pass over faults with the excuse that they are our sinful nature, and not our own. But look well into the Apostle's description and you can easily see how we are to guard against such a mistake. The question always is: Have we consented to them? The Apostle is here arguing that even, at the very best, man cannot achieve his own freedom. No, not even when he struggles against sin so earnestly that he can honestly

say, 'It is not I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me.' Not even then can any human aid deliver us from the body of this death. So in this passage the Apostle will not allow us to use his words unless we can honestly put ourselves in the position which he has supposed. Can we honestly say that our sins were involuntary? There are some that we may fairly call by that name; sins which slip from us in the surprise of the moment, and which we would not have committed had we a moment more to think; sins which we did not see the full nature of when we did them, and which we immediately endeavour to set right as far as they can be set right; sins which we are trying honestly to cure, but which are still making a hard fight to retain their place; such sins as these we may very often say are really not our own. And with regard to all these we may rightly feel that God, for the sake of Christ, will wipe them all away, and entirely forgive them. These are the tokens of that fearful infirmity of our nature, whose origin we know not; whose power over us Christ only, and the atonement of Christ, and not we ourselves, can break down; whose marks will remain with us as long as we live, but whose fetters shall not hold us from coming to our God, nor take away from us His love. Such sins are not ours; they are the sin that dwelleth in us. And though if we have any Christian feeling we must grieve over them, and be pained at them, yet they ought not to fill us with any unfilial fear, as if God would love us

no more, or would cast us away, or would refuse us His aid, because we are not all at once what we ought to be. In so far as we do not consent to our own faults, in so far they are not our own; in so far as we yield to them they are ours. And God, who is greater than our heart and knoweth all things, can see when we have honestly striven, and assuredly will not deny His help to such a struggle.

Lastly, there is one lesson more that belongs to this doctrine. And that is, that we must not be disappointed, or cast down, or disheartened, or sulky, because we find our self-improvement very much slower than we expect or like. The evil to be cured is past human remedy. God will cure it if we wish. But He will cure it in His own way and at His own time. We must be content to fight the battle in His name and in His strength, and leave the issue in His hands. We must not complain if a temptation, which we have had much trouble with, becomes stronger instead of weaker. We must not complain if we fall after we have begun to think ourselves tolerably safe. We must not complain if we try all manner of helps and aids and find them not enough. We must not complain if we find that very earnest and warm prayers are followed in a very few hours by feelings so cold that we can hardly keep in the strait path for want of impulse to do so; if very sincere repentance is followed by a sort of reaction which makes the fault seem after all not nearly so bad as it did; if very determined

resolutions gradually wear out until, when the moment comes for acting on them, we even forget that we made them. Such results we shall surely find; for our enemy can take many shapes and still retain his power; and all our best endeavours will never repel him. God only can really give the victory; and God assuredly will. But God will not give it in the precise way that we ask for it; for He knows better than we can know the best way and the best time. And hence it is, that beyond all other graces, the grace of perseverance is the one to which victory is promised: that perseverance which enables us in spite of disappointment in ourselves, and of seeing no fruit of all our endeavours, and of coldness in the heart, and of poorness in the devotions, still to continue in the path which He has commanded; that perseverance shall one day be acknowledged as a title to His love, and a proof of our being His children.

These are the lessons which I would draw from the doctrine of Original Sin, and I would sum them all up in this: Cast all your care upon God, for God careth for you. It is, no doubt, to knit us more closely to God that the doctrine is revealed at all. The true life of the soul is to be found in union with its Maker. Whatever thoughts, whatever truths bring us in spirit to Christ and lead us to join our hearts to Him; whatever casts before us the shield of His memory, and supports us by the sense of His presence; whatever makes it easier for us to put ourselves in mind of Him, to feel that He is looking

at us, to dedicate to Him both our daily work as His appointment, and our daily pleasures as His gift; whatever brings us to the foot of that Cross on which He finished the work of our salvation, these things, brethren, must be good and profitable; think therefore on these things.

SERMON XIII.

SINS OF SURPRISE.

ST. LUKE xxii. 62.

'And Peter went out and wept bitterly.'

THE sin of St. Peter, which was read to us in the Second Lesson of this morning, is the most marked instance that we have in the Bible of a peculiar and very trying class of sins, sins of surprise. There can be no question at all that St. Peter was a really brave man. Long before his fall he had shewn this when, seeing our Lord walking on the water, he had exclaimed, 'Lord, bid me come unto Thee on the water.' The confident declaration that he was ready to follow our Lord to prison, and even to death, was not the boast of a vaunting coward covering a faint heart with bold words; nor was it even the foolish self-confidence of one who did not know himself. He came armed to the Garden of Gethsemane, and prepared to use his weapon. Weak as the band of disciples was, he plainly was quite prepared to head them in defending his Master against the Jewish soldiers; and when Judas

had betrayed our Lord, and the soldiers were going to arrest Him, St. Peter commenced resistance, and, no doubt, would have persisted in it but for our Lord's own command. Here there was no lack of courage. Nor, again, was there in his following our Lord into the Palace of the High Priest, impelled by eager interest to know what would happen to the Master Whom he loved. Why then did he fall? Why did he fall in spite of precise warning? Why did he use almost the very words which our Lord had told him he would, which he himself had said he would not utter? 'Woman, I know Him not.' Plainly, because he was taken by surprise. He did expect temptation; but not there; not then; not from that quarter. Suddenly, as he was listening with eager interest to the trial going on in the remote part of the hall; when he had forgotten all about himself, and all about his own danger, and all about his own temptation, a maid looks him in the face and says, 'Thou art also of them.' The answer rises to the lips before the will has time to act: 'Woman, I know Him not.' It was a lie; a lie all the more base because he had been warned against it; because our Lord was just in the circumstances to need the testimony and moral support of friends; because, above all, he must have known that if there was one thing which would add to our Lord's burden of woe at that moment it must have been the lie of a loved follower. No foresight of the sin could prevent that wound from going deep, even to the very heart; no sense

of the sins of the world in general, or of the fierce Jewish authorities then standing round, could blunt the feeling of being betrayed and deserted by such a cherished follower. But all this which St. Peter must have known and felt, not as much certainly as our Lord knew and felt it, but yet quite enough to take away all excuse of ignorance, all this was not enough to check the ready lie, which seemed at the moment the only escape. Once the first lie was told, we hardly need to ask why the second and third followed? He seems at first to have hastened to the door, and then to have been challenged again; he repeated the sin; indeed he had not, perhaps, had time to recover his nerves; but afraid of being arrested, or whatever else he feared, he turned back once more to the crowd round the fire and remained quiet for some time undistinguished among the others. But about an hour after, when time had lessened his alarm, he began again to enter into the conversation, and again he is suddenly and unexpectedly crossed by the assertion that his speech proved him a Galilean, and that he was, no doubt, one of the party. Who that has ever been surprised into wrong has not also experienced this second, or even third, surprise following so soon? Who has not felt something almost like indignation that the temptations should come so thick upon him? Who has not felt something like anger that the very same trial should be repeated within so short a time? Our being warned does not prevent our being taken by surprise; no, nor our having lately fallen:

no, nor our having felt deep shame and self-reproach: sometimes that very shame and self-reproach may so absorb our attention as to make it still more easy to surprise us than before. Brave as he was, St. Peter had stumbled into an act of cowardice—of base cowardice; and he did not see his way out. We may fancy him going back to the fire in bitter anger with himself, nervously silent at first, and then, perhaps, joining in the talk about his Master, and, perhaps, even venturing to say something in his defence, when the eyes of all are suddenly turned upon him by the random reply of one whom he was contradicting. This last time was enough. He caught our Lord's look turned on him from the other end of the room, and hastened out and wept bitterly.

These sins of surprise have given rise to the remark, that almost every great saint in the Bible is recorded to have fallen into the very sin from which his character seemed likely to guard him. Moses, the meekest of all men upon the earth, whom hardly even God's own command could encourage to put himself forward as the leader of God's people, burst out into the arrogant exclamation, 'Hear now, ye rebels, must we fetch you water out of this rock?' David, the tenderest of all hearts, is betrayed into committing murder. Solomon, the wisest of all intellects, stoops to the folly of idolatry. Such falls as these are almost always, in the first instance, sins of surprise. The very fact that our nature abhors such sins, or that we have completely subdued them, throws

us off our guard. We should be startled if we were on the verge of doing some wrong which we had but half subdued. Our consciences would warn us with a sharp pang that we were running into danger. But sins which we have never yet been tempted to commit, or which we have not committed for very long, seem to have nothing in them to frighten us. And so we are tripped up before our enemy is in sight. You have, perhaps, by nature a mild temper, or, perhaps, by hard struggles you have so subdued it that you do not ever think of that as a serious danger. Suddenly you are annoyed, apparently without any reason at all, and when you had not expected it; and before you quite know what you have done, your self-command has deserted you. You have, perhaps, learnt to be steady in doing the duties of the day; you are known to yourself and others to be punctual and careful. But suddenly some seduction which you had never thought of steps in, and you have wasted your time before you have realized the fact that you were doing so. These are the temptations of every day. But there are much darker ones possible, and alas! not only possible, but not rare. How very common, for instance, is this very temptation under which St. Peter fell; a sudden temptation to untruth. How common is the temptation to say what will shake the friendship of years; a misunderstood word or look makes you utter what you can never forget, and what you would give worlds to recall. How common is the temptation to fleshly sins—such as greediness, or

even worse; the temptation coming so unexpectedly as to carry away the will for the moment, as some bursting torrent sweeps away an obstacle in its path.

Now such sins as these will often make a Christian sadly ask why they are permitted! It is impossible not to feel that they are not all our own. We are not responsible for them at all in the same sense in which we are responsible for habitual sins or for deliberate sins. A deliberate sin obviously stands on a footing of its own. No man's conscience will look back on a planned and intentional piece of wickedness, or carelessness of plain duty, and say it was the fault of the temptation, not of the man. And habitual sins, though they sometimes seem like a series of sins of surprise, yet are not so really, and our conscience readily distinguishes them. For habitual sins always settle down into definite tracks which we can avoid if we choose. They always give us the opportunity to provide against them by proper precautions. We can avoid the temptations which we know will bring them. We can anticipate almost the precise moment when the temptation will come. We know pretty accurately the shape which the temptation will take. For such sins we are fully responsible, and we know it. They are known and open enemies whom it is our special business to fight, and whom we can certainly and shall certainly defeat. But the true sins of surprise seem more than any others to realise St. Paul's words, 'It is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me.' Why are these

permitted to torment us, and what are we to do with them? Of course when we ask why they are permitted to torment us, we do not mean to deny that if we were what we ought to be, they would not, indeed they could not, be permitted. If we were as truly servants of Christ as we are all pledged to be, such temptations would never lead us beyond mere mistakes, would never lead us into downright sin at all. It is by laying hold of some weak point that such sins usually prevail against us. Look at St. Peter's courage. Was it yet perfect? He was ready, no doubt, for prison and for death. But it is plain that when he said that, he did not mean such a death as our Lord's; he meant a hard-fought fight, and death either in battle or in all the glory of martyrdom for an honoured cause. But death without a stroke struck for the right, the death of a common felon, death on the gallows with all the ignominy that would attend it, and without the consciousness of having first fought a noble fight, for that he was not ready, for that he had not courage. So he fell because his truth and his courage were not truly sound. There was still mixed in them much that was unheavenly, much that was selfish. This is almost always the case with such sins. They are too much for us, because the very best parts in our character so very often have something in them unsound. Now this will answer our question. For such temptations are expressly and plainly intended to test the unsoundness of our armour. We are apparently free from some fault:

either we were free born, or we have set ourselves free in the spiritual battle. But is our freedom complete: are we really free? What is it that we care for, the thing or the appearance? There is no test like a sudden and quite unexpected trial. This probes a man to the very quick. It puts him out of all the shifts by which he may have hitherto either rightly avoided the trial, or wrongly covered his yielding to it. It forces him to grapple with the enemy. But the trial does not end because the man is defeated. A second trial then begins, quite as hard or harder. You have fancied yourself free. A sudden temptation has proved to yourself and to others that you are not so free as you thought and seemed. And now what will you do with the discovery? You have been surprised into violence of temper, into injustice, into indulgence of the body, into a lie. What will you do? Have you still left behind the Christian humility, and the Christian manliness, which accept the shame and strive to be more careful for the future? Your weakness is exposed. You can no longer challenge the respect of your fellow-men in the same way that you might have done before. You can no longer feel that though your own conscience may lay much, your fellows can lay little to your charge. If you really did not care for being, but only for being thought, good, all that you cared for is gone. You may win a second reputation, a higher reputation in the eyes of the true Judge, but it will be a different reputation, no longer one that will enable you secretly, and almost

without your own knowledge, to foster anything like pride. You will for a long time feel that you are not where you once were. If you really cared to be and not merely to seem, you will humbly and quietly do your best, and look upon your fall, so far as it is your own, as a thing to be guarded against and mended, and so far as it comes from God, as a merciful revelation to you of your own true nature. But, meanwhile, you will be tempted to sullenness, you will be tempted to recklessness, you will be tempted to apathy. And if you yield you will, indeed, make the first fall all your own by working it into your nature.

This, however, is not all that is to be said of such sins of surprise. They are particularly the sins which St. Paul commends to the care of Christian friends: 'If any man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual restore such an one in the spirit of meekness.' It is by these sins of surprise that a man is rightly said to be overtaken. It is from the consequences of such sins that any really Christian society can do much to save its members. And how?—Chiefly by not judging harshly. Society in such matters is generally right in the abstract rule, but wrong in applying it to individual cases. Society is always ready to acknowledge the repentance of one who has steadily faced all the consequences of wrong-doing, and has never allowed those consequences to turn him from his purpose of repenting. But these are the strong, who hardly want any help at all. It is the

weak soul that has fallen into sin partly from surprise, partly from weakness, that really needs the help of fellow-Christians. And that help must be given by intimate friends, and by older or stronger Christians. And it must be given by shewing a sympathy with the pain which such sins bring in their consequence, by shewing a readiness to welcome every effort towards repentance, by eagerness to judge as favourably as it is possible to judge, by a generous forgetfulness of whatever is plainly forsaken; in short, by giving that sort of help which each man's conscience will tell him would be best for himself in the same circumstances; not a help to think lightly of what is wrong, but a help to be braver and firmer in doing right; that help which restores self-respect, and revives hope, and unites the fallen to the company of his fellows.

SERMON XIV.

LITTLE THINGS.

ST. MATTHEW v. 19.

'*Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so; he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven.*'

INDIFFERENCE about little duties; indifference about little faults; a sort of laxity and carelessness about our lives; a perpetual stepping on the verge, or just over the verge of evil; this is what our Lord here speaks of as reducing even Christians to the lowest rank, and robbing them of their true place. He is speaking not to wilful sinners but to careless disciples; not to men who had lost their hold on God's law and God's love altogether; but to men who, to use St. Paul's words, run uncertainly, and fight as one that beateth the air. Carelessness may go so far as to forfeit a man's place entirely; it always lowers a man's place, and, as our Lord says here, makes him the least in the kingdom, even when it does not eject him from it. To say this to an unbeliever, to one who has no real love for Christ, would indeed be useless. There

are men who would reply at once: 'So as I am only saved, I care not whether I be high or low.' Such men shew by their reply that they are beyond the limit of the argument. To them these words are not said. To such men we must award a different sentence. Their carelessness has gone so far that they are not in the Kingdom of Heaven at all. A man who really feels that so as he is saved, he cares not whether he pleases God much or little, such a man may take it for granted that in his present state of mind he is not saved. He is not the least in the Kingdom of Heaven; he is outside the kingdom altogether. To him these words have no meaning. But to the Christian who is in earnest, yet careless notwithstanding; to the Christian who loves God, and loves God's law, and feels the power of conscience, but does not love enough to be strict with himself, these words are a warning. Carelessness always drags a man down; and if carelessness increase till it become a consistent principle of action, it drags a man down to the lowest place; and when a man is there, obviously enough there needs only a little more movement in the same direction to thrust him quite out. To break little commandments is bad; to do so consciously is worse; to do so avowedly and to defend it, to maintain it as a principle before others, this is worst of all; when we come to that we are at the lowest, and are at the point of falling away.

Now, of course our Lord does not mean here deliberate

sins. He means just those little, hardly noticed trifles, which make up a very large part of our lives; which determine to a very large extent the complexion of our characters; which conscience clearly enough decides in one way and not in the other way; but any one of which taken alone seems hardly worth considering. The uncontrolled tongue; the slight neglect of strict duty; the wandering eye in the House of God; the wandering thought at public prayer; the careless utterance of private devotions; the giving way now to a slight fit of temper; now to a slight fit of laziness; now to an impulse of conceit; now to the momentary indulgence of an impure thought; such things as these may be very slight, each taken by itself. As we pass through these temptations we are inclined to make very little of them. What great harm if we are overcome in so mere a trifle? What is the good of being so excessively particular? Is it really consistent with the liberty of the Gospel to be always watching our way? Do we not see after all not a few who are very strict with themselves, and yet are not so true, not so solid, not so real, as others who move more freely? Is not this scrupulousness a mere mistake? And so we persuade ourselves, and persuade others too, that it is not a bad thing, that it is, perhaps, even a good thing to break these least commandments. But not so saith our Lord.

There is of course a strictness which is a mere mistake; there is a strictness which interferes with the liberty

of the Gospel. The exaggeration of this strictness was seen in the Pharisee. And though nothing is ever repeated in the world, and Pharisaism having once appeared and passed away cannot ever return precisely as it was, yet of course the same spirit is possible still. But there is no mistake about the true nature of this kind of strictness; it can be known by infallible marks. It puts the mere rule above the principle; expediency above kindness; a dead law above the true human impulses. It was that which taught man that it was not right to heal on the Sabbath; that giving to God's treasury was better than succouring parents; that the sanctity of oaths depended on the form in which they were taken; that eating unclean meats was a greater defilement than thinking bad thoughts. There is no mistaking the kindred to which such doctrines as these belong. Indeed such strictness as this is not merely a mistake; it is peculiarly blinding. A strictness which hardens the human feelings is sure to be evil.

And there is yet another strictness which may rightly be called a mistake; that is, not the strong self-willed strictness of the Pharisee, but the weak cowardly strictness of the morbid. There is such a thing as not recognising God's abundance of love, and fancying that it is a pleasure to Him to see us refusing pleasures. He is our Father; but we are sometimes tempted, in morbid states of mind, to feel towards Him as if He were rather our Taskmaster, and as if He did not delight in the enjoy-

ment of His creatures. We shrink from thinking that it pleases Him to see us happy; and so we deny ourselves what He puts within our reach, not in order to train and harden ourselves, which would be a very good reason, but from a sort of feeling that all enjoyment is somewhat sinful in its nature, which is a mistake. This kind of strictness is not so much to be blamed as to be pitied; yet it certainly is a mistake. But this, too, has its marks. Any strictness which sours our temper, which makes us dislike our fellow-creatures, which shuts us up in ourselves; or, again, any which interferes with our duties, and oppresses us with little fidgetty difficulties, instead of carrying us along in obeying the laws of our state of life, is almost certain to be a morbid strictness. The object of all strictness is to fence duties round, so as to make their performance more sure, and to fence our heart round, so as to make the feelings more human and so more heavenly; and if our strictness do not give us these results, we must look to it that we are not making some great blunder.

But after making these deductions, and allowing that these two kinds of strictness in life are mistakes and ought to be discouraged, the substantial truth still remains, that he who would do good service must be strict with himself, and the man who is not strict will surely sink into the lowest place, and may sink out of Christ's kingdom altogether.

There are two blessings which are especially attached

to strictness of life. One is cheerfulness, the other is security.

Just at first sight we might look on cheerfulness as more likely to be found with the free and careless life than with the strict and watchful. But there cannot be a greater mistake. Strictness is the indispensable condition of cheerfulness. I do not mean of mirth and gaiety, of course. Boisterous spirits may often enough be found in one who lives carelessly. But these boisterous spirits are quite compatible with much unhappiness. The uniform calm and cheerfulness which lights up the face of a true Christian, the happy expression of countenance, the sunshine on the brow,—these are never to be found where the life is not careful. I do not mean at all that strictness will always make a man cheerful. God sometimes permits His truest servants to be afflicted with depression of spirits for many reasons. But, assuredly, though you may sometimes see strictness of life without cheerfulness of spirits, you never see cheerfulness of spirits without strictness of life.

And if you think of it, this stands to reason. What is so depressing as the perpetual recurrence of small pangs of remorse? The careless man is never free from some little thing which embitters his religious happiness. He cannot approach God without a constant sense of not having really tried to please Him. He always carries about with him a sense of having neglected his Lord's

wishes. A great sin is something to be definitely repented of, and the sorrow of penitence seems to bring a man close to Him who alone can forgive sins and take away sorrows. But to have no one definite thing to repent of, only a general sense of having neglected God's love altogether, how can that fail to stand between us and Him? Cheerfulness, to be true and lasting, and not a mere passing flush of high spirits, must come from within, not from without. How can any one find cheerfulness within who is conscious of being neglectful of himself, and careless of his Master's work? The careless Christian is sure to be discontented with himself. He is never what he feels he might be. He just takes off all the beauty and grace from his service, and so robs himself of the very thing which would make that service happy. And he has, too, a perpetual sense that he makes a dear bargain. The little irksomeness of being strict is nothing to the great irksomeness of being displeased with his own life. The man who has been a great sinner is sad; but the careless Christian is gloomy; and gloom is a heavier burden than sadness by far.

The other special blessing of strictness, namely, security, follows partly from the first. For there is no greater danger to a religious life than gloom. If you find religion gloomy, the temptation to find brightness in some other direction becomes enormously strengthened. Religion seems to present no satisfying pleasures; so a man seeks

satisfaction in what is distinctly wrong. But besides this it is quite obvious that the careless Christian is like a man who never allows himself a margin in guiding his course. No failure is more certain in the end than that of the merchant who makes his calculations on the supposition that he will never make a false speculation, and allows himself no reserve for a time of reverses. No defeat is more certain in the end than that of the general who invariably hazards all, and never counts on even a partial repulse. And certainly the same rule applies to religious life. Some day or other, in your carelessness of how you live, you come into a sudden torrent of temptation, and are swept away.

It is quite natural that now, at the beginning of a new half-year, we should begin with new resolves. We will brace ourselves up. We will make this half-year a decided improvement on the last. We will not neglect the many blessings that Christ pours down upon us in a place like this. We will make this half a little better at any rate, even if we fail in making it much better. We will not allow our consciences to reproach us so severely again. In God's name we will win the victory. Is not this the hope of many a Christian when he gets an opportunity of making a new start? Now, then, let me add to these resolutions this word of warning, Despise not small things. Try to make your service strict and careful. No doubt the bent of your will is chiefly shewn

in the great duties; but the sense of love and of wishing to be loved is chiefly shewn in the small duties. The son who would win his father's heart, the son who is full of his mother's love, shews this not so much in great sacrifices: these may often come from other motives: but in little attentions, in small unobserved sacrifices, in secret kindnesses, in hidden devotions. Of course it would be foolish to invert the proper order of duty and to put the little above the great, and the ornament as it were above the substance. But let each have its place. The great sterling duties, the exact truth of word, the resolute refusal to countenance wrong, the command of temper, the mastery of indolence, the unstained purity,—these, and such as these, form the character, and fashion our souls into instruments in God's hands for high and heavenly purposes in His Providence. But the carefulness over details, the watchfulness against faults which we know to be faults, but which, notwithstanding, seem venial, the devout regularity and attention in our private prayers, the invariable good-humour of our manners, the seeking for occasions of kindness and unselfishness, the avoidance of little temptations, the care not to cause little annoyances and little troubles,—to attend to all this for the sake of Christ our Master is the natural and fitting expression of a loving heart. And such love is always repaid ten thousand-fold. It is repaid in itself, for the consciousness of it is one of the greatest of all blessings; but it is repaid still more by the

ever-growing sense of belonging to Him to Whom all this is offered. Servants and subjects offer labour, but only children come near enough to offer trifles. If we would be children, we must love like children, and choose anything rather than to be least in the love of our Father.

SERMON XV.

FRIENDSHIP.

PROV. xxvii. 17.

'Iron sharpeneth iron: so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend.'

THESE words express what one friend should be to another; a whetstone to give keenness to the edge of his energy. And this use of friendship, valuable under all circumstances and in all undertakings that belong to earth, does not lose its value in the service of Christ. In that service too a friend can encourage his friend, when duty is difficult, or wearisome, or painful; can comfort his friend when the discharge of duty has brought painful consequences, as it very often will; can advise his friend when there are real or fancied perplexities in the path; can help his friend to repent when repentance has become a necessity. In that service, more than in any other, the conviction of a true heart and thorough sympathy close at hand is the greatest help that any man can have. But it is undeniable that friendship is too often made the stepping-stone to the

worst falls, and that many a sinner has his friends, perhaps his dearest and most intimate friends, to thank for his having fallen into sins which, left to himself, he would have shrunk from with horror. God has mercifully hedged round most sins with many barriers. There is first the barrier which, while it lasts, is so very powerful, and when it has once been broken down, can never be set up again—the barrier of ignorance. We are tempted—sorely tempted; but, fortunately for ourselves, we are as yet quite ignorant how the desire that tempts us can be gratified. The sin may be in itself perfectly easy, but from pure ignorance the way to it seems to us inaccessible; and so the wrong desire dies out from mere hopelessness. This ignorance of innocence cannot last, and is not meant to last. It is the protection of childhood, and is intended to fall away from our eyes as we grow older. But the natural way for us to attain the knowledge of evil, which must come some day or other, is simply by the experience of life. Instead of that, how very often do we gain an unhealthy acquaintance with a needless knowledge from the lips and example of friends. Instead of learning evil when we are strong enough to resist it, when we are in circumstances not to be allured by it, how often is the unholy revelation made in conjunction with the very worst incentives to give way to temptation. A friend teaching his friend the way to sin is the most shocking use of friendship that can be imagined. And yet it

is not uncommon: not uncommon from mere thoughtlessness; the thoughtlessness of the soul that having plunged into evil thinks little of seeing another plunge after him.

The second barrier in the way to evil is shame. And if a friend takes away the first, how still more often does he help to take away the second. This shame is not like ignorance; it is not merely a shield thrown by God around our childhood; it is part of the defensive armour which we are to wear through life. It is deeply worked into our very nature. And even after it has been torn away, it may yet be replaced, and indeed, if we are to be God's children, it must be replaced. But for a time it may often be torn away; and who has the same power of tearing it away as a friend? A friend may do worse than tear it away; he may turn it against the truth, and may make us ashamed of doing right instead of ashamed of doing wrong. We are constantly restrained in evil by an unwillingness to expose the evil to other eyes. What a change comes over us as soon as we have discovered that the eyes of whose contempt or disapproval we were afraid, have no contempt or disapproval for evil, but rather for good. But still more fatal is the countenance of the friend who supports us against the call to repentance. For times come when shame bids us repent; perhaps the shame of our own consciences; perhaps the shame called up by the presence of others: and then a friend who stands

by to encourage us to bear and not to yield to shame, is worse than the worst enemy that we can ever have.

And then as the soul goes on from one sin to another, there is yet another, a third, powerful barrier which checks its folly: the affection that we feel for parents, for home, for those natural friends whom God's Providence has given us. And this, too, a friend is better able than any one else to break through. A friend can supply us with another affection near at hand to take the place of that distant affection on which we are turning our backs. A friend's voice can check the whispers of memory and of true love. A friend can shew as much, perhaps more self-devotion, more generous preference, more sympathy, more warmth, in helping us along in wrong than we ever found anywhere in helping us to keep to the right.

Such is what friendship may do. And the worst of it is, that the friendship which does all this, which enlightens us with bad knowledge, which helps us to conquer shame, which helps to break down the affection which God has blessed, is by no means insincere or selfish. It is very often really generous, really hearty and unselfish and devoted, really true in its sympathy and warm in its affection. It is to this truth and warmth that it owes its power; for whenever a hollow and false friendship would lead us astray, it does not lead us nearly so far without being found out. This friendship does not lead us into evil with any wish to do us harm, but

simply for the sake of our companionship. The friend who indulges in wrong pleasures wishes his friend to share them, not because they are wrong, but because they are pleasures, and because he wants companionship. And he thinks little of the mischief that he is doing to his friend, precisely in the same way that he thinks little of the mischief that he is doing to himself.

But this makes it all the more shocking. It is shocking that what is in itself so beautiful, so excellent, should be perverted to such deadly mischief. And it is still more shocking to think how very often a little strength of mind in either one friend or the other would prevent the mischief altogether. You who have yielded so readily to your friend's persuasion, and have joined him in doing wrong because he pressed it on your friendship, you know not how many times a very little resistance would have saved both him and yourself; you know not how many times he was hesitating already, and would have drawn back altogether if you had but given him an opening to do so; you know not how often, at the very time he was arguing with you, he was in reality arguing with his own conscience, and might have been turned back with ease if you had not given way; you know not how often the apparent tempter has been the tempted, and he has led only because he knew you would follow,—he has been unable to resist the tacit flattery of your being willing to follow him, and had you refused that would have found no pleasure in the evil indulgence.

It is sometimes, but not often, the duty of a true friend openly to find fault with his friend. And when that duty comes, a servant of Christ must not be so cowardly as to flinch from it. But the occasion is very rare. In most cases all that is wanted is to hold to the right, and you will do more towards holding your friend to the right than by all manner of exhortations. It is almost impossible to over-estimate the power with which a quiet and resolute obedience to conscience will prove an anchor to a friend even more than to a man's own self. But if we can add to that the cheerfulness which brightens all the troubles of the day as they come, the simplicity which never leaves room for suspecting a hidden purpose, the generosity which never judges hardly but always interprets all things in their best sense,—such a friend as that is, more than almost anything else that *this* world can give, a help to a Christian life.

I believe that there are few things which can give acuter pain to the soul in after years than the memory of friends misled by our friendship. To see one whom you once cared for, even if you cannot care for him as much as you did, following a steady course of sin, and to know that you helped him to set out on that course; to trace definite faults in his character to definite acts or habits of yours; to know, as far as human knowledge goes, that your words first taught him impurity, and that he has never since been pure; or that your suggestion first made him conceal a fault with a lie,

and that his word cannot now be relied on; or that your example and encouragement first initiated him in indulgences which have now become settled habits of sin;—to know all this, and to be utterly powerless to check it, and to see it going before you, as it were, out of this world into the other; an evil work which is not all yours, but which carries into eternity the marks of your hand; to see all this, and to feel bound up by your share in it beyond all power of escape (for who can recall the past?)—what can be more deeply painful, however much you yourself may have repented of your sins and have surrendered your soul to God? I believe that of all the repented sins whose remembrance sometimes saddens even the enjoyment of God's forgiveness, there is none which cuts the Christian's heart so deeply as such remembrances as these.

And the memory of friendship ought to be, and might be, so very different. Friendship, and sympathy, and cheerful example might help us more than any teaching in the world to grow up soldiers and servants of Christ, and to fight His battle when we were grown up. Iron cannot sharpen iron more than we might sharpen each other. The very differences in our character might be such a help to us in making friendship valuable, because, when one friend is much tempted, the other is strong and can uphold him, and yet, when another kind of temptation comes, will receive back as much support as he gave. And this has double force while we are

young and are ready to give and receive sympathy. Friendships made at school often last through life, and only grow warmer and stronger as life lasts. And such friends find a tie in having been at school together which seems firmer than any other tie that has ever bound their hearts.

It is a delight to them to look back on school days and remember the beginning of their friendship for each other. But how tenfold is it greater if each can remember the support that he got from the other in doing right when temptation or perplexity made it difficult; if each can recall to himself occasions when he might have fallen had not his friend, by advice, or warm-hearted sympathy, or good-humoured but firm plainness of speech, upheld him. When right is unpopular how much help a friend can give; when sinful disobedience is very tempting, how great a check a friend can be. At such a time we are not unfrequently on the brink of a precipice, and we see afterwards, what we do not see at the time, that a fall would have been utter ruin. And to remember that our friend saved us from that fall; perhaps by voluntarily sharing our difficulties, perhaps by earnestly standing in our way, that is a memory that is never recalled without gratitude. How often it must happen that a man, looking back on his younger days, remarks that he was going wrong, and as far as he could see would have ended in utter loss of himself and his own soul, when he was saved by falling in with one whom he first

learnt to like, and then to appreciate, and then to imitate. And perhaps this very one looks back in the same way on the same first meeting, and is thankful for lessons just given when they were needed. Sometimes, again, it happens that a man or a boy is called away, and yet has sown seed behind him in the hearts of friends which shall spring up in his absence to a harvest of thanksgivings in the sight of God: the example of a simple-minded and quiet discharge of duty, or of a steady effort to raise the tone of his own mind. Such are what friendships have been; such are what friendships may always be. Blessings they are, given by God's Providence; blessings which we may sadly misuse if we will; blessings which we shall be likely to remember for the rest of life, and to the memory of which God has attached the highest and purest pleasure, the bitterest and most stinging pain.

SERMON XVI.

TEMPTING OTHERS.

ST. MATTHEW xviii. 7.

'Woe unto the world because of offences! For it must needs be that offences come; but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh.'

If there is any work in the world which peculiarly deserves the name of the work of the devil, it is the hindrance which men sometimes put in the path which their fellow-creatures are called by God to walk in. Of all the temptations which surround us in this world of temptations, the most difficult, in almost all cases, to deal with are those which our fellow-men cast in our way. Temptations of the devil, springing from within the soul, can generally be evaded even if they seem irresistible in their direct encounter. Temptations from bodily appetite, the most terrible of all temptations in the moment of their power, can almost always be foreseen and a means of escape provided. But our duties will not let us quit the company of our fellows, and if they choose to tempt us there is nothing left but to bear the temptation as best we may.

And so exposed to its full brunt, betraying, as we are almost sure to do in course of time, our assailable points, we lie at their mercy, if not to ruin us, yet to make our way upwards unhappy, difficult, sin-stained; to pierce us with remorse; to cloud us with perplexity; to rob us of self-respect; to take from our service, if not its substantial truth and devotion, yet all its grace and beauty, all that might cheer our hearts in the discharge of it. Surely, as I said before, if there is any work of man which peculiarly deserves the name of the devil's work it is this. And yet it is so common that our Lord treats it as the order of nature: 'It must needs be that offences come.'

Indeed, this sin of hindering struggling sinners in their weak endeavours to do right, is so common that its commonness is made its excuse. There is a sort of feeling in those who put their fellow-men to such trials which may be thus expressed: 'I have done him little harm; if I did not somebody else would. And, after all, what is his goodness worth if it will not stand such a temptation as this?' A man sneers at obedience to conscience; and justifies himself by saying that conscience must, in reality, be a very worthless thing if it cannot hold a man up against a sneer. Another offers seducing allurements to entice his fellows from a plain duty, and justifies himself by saying that, if he did not, some one else would. Another does the devil's work without excusing himself at all, and simply puts every obstacle that he can in the way of his fellow-creatures being more obedient than himself.

It must needs be that these offences, that is, these stumbling-blocks, will come. It must needs be; that is, it is quite certain to be. It is quite certain that, wherever we are, we shall find our duty beset with such stumbling-blocks as these. It is quite certain that we shall meet with occasions when to do right will be painful to ourselves, resisted by all around us, perhaps encouraged by no single soul of all whom we have expected to aid us. It is quite certain that, even of those who ought to make duty easy, some from weakness, some from blindness, some perhaps even from wilfulness or wickedness, will make duty difficult. And so we must not plead these temptations as any excuse. We must not fancy that when we are so tempted we shall be forgiven for yielding; or that God, in denouncing sin, has forgotten these temptations, and will therefore retract His condemnation in the case of those who are so tempted. No; the temptation is common and not extraordinary, and we shall be punished for giving way to it. The temptation is so sure to come that we must count upon it; and when we read of God's judgment of sin, we must understand that it applies to sin committed under such temptation. It is the order of the world; it is the fire in which we are to be tried; it is the touchstone of our truth and our faith; it is the experiment of our love; it is the test by which our souls must be valued. But for all that there is no excuse for the tempter. Woe to that man by whom the offence cometh; woe to that man who makes himself the instrument of

putting his brothers to their hardest probation; woe to him even if his wicked work end in confirming the saint in his holiness, or in strengthening the weak against his own weakness. Whatever the end may be, woe to the man that puts a stumbling-block in his brother's way. It were better for that man if a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea.

The most glaring form of this sin is that of persecuting and ridiculing the conscientious. It is almost always easy to find means for doing this. No one, however conscientious, is infallible. Every one who endeavours to live as God would have him is quite sure to lay himself open to ridicule, if to nothing worse. There is mixed up with our very best actions quite enough of weakness, of folly, of human motives, of human self-seeking, to give a good handle to any one who seeks for a handle, and supply materials for a bitter jest, for a scoff, not quite undeserved. There is always something in the conduct of the very best which may well merit even contempt. And how easy to extend the treatment of this fault to the whole conduct; how easy to sneer at what is good because it is mixed up with bad; how easy to merge it all in one indiscriminate condemnation, and ridicule the imperfect virtue because it is imperfect; how easy this is, and yet how very wicked. Granted that the poor sinner's imperfect struggles are defiled with all kinds of false and self-deceitful motives, yet is the best help given to him by sneering at

all that he does, good and bad alike? I will take the case of one who seems most of all to deserve this treatment, the conceited and affected, the pompous and pretentious, who yet is trying in a sort of way to do his duty. His folly deserves severe reproof; and even ridicule is perfectly justifiable if it be carefully and plainly directed against his silly conceit, against his affectation and self-righteousness. But when it goes beyond that and interferes with his weak endeavours to be a Christian, as it too often does, what can we say of it but that the devil has his own special work in hand, and is employing some of his servants to keep for him a soul that longs to escape? And how rarely does this tempter stop here: how common it is for ridicule and persecution not to attack the conceit of superior goodness, but the very endeavour to be good, however humble, however simple. In particular, how very frequently does this kind of persecution throw obstacles in the way of repentance. Any one who has got a sort of character is, perhaps, in all societies allowed after a time to keep it up. He does no more than is expected of him, and he is left alone on that account. But if any one feels that the life he has been living is not quite what it should be, and endeavours to lift himself out of it, what difficulty that he has to encounter is equal to that which his companions and acquaintance throw in his way? How often do they sneer at his pretending to be any better than he was, or, as they are apt to say, any better than other people! How much has he to encounter

in cold looks, in scoffs, in bitter reminders of past follies, in sarcastic allusions, in every kind of petty persecution! And how much wickeder does wickedness become when it thus aims not merely at the indulgence of its own desires, but at keeping all others down to its own level! Christ came from Heaven; He bore the pains of poverty, of persecution, of a whole life of humiliation, of a death of shame, of the agony of a forsaken soul, all to keep and save that which was lost. Christ's chief work is to enable the penitent to repent. The chief joy in Heaven is when the sinner is found in the desert by the Shepherd and brought home, when the prodigal son comes back to his Father's house. If this be Christ's work and the angels' joy, whose work must it be to make repentance hard, and keep the prodigal son away, and turn the sheep aside that is returning to the fold? Christ specially announces it as His peculiar character that He will not break the bruised reed nor quench the smoking flax. However faint the hopes of the sinner, however weak the struggle in his heart, however poor his efforts to return, yet Christ watches all tenderly, eagerly, helpingly. What shall be said of him who tramples out the flame of heavenly love just when its first faint spark shewed that it was alive?

Now, of course I do not mean that there are very many who deliberately and maliciously set to work to sneer down goodness or even repentance. Such sins are very rare; and the devil's work in the world is not done so unskilfully as that. This sin, just like other sins, is

generally an act of weakness. A sort of indignation rises in the minds of not a few at seeing examples of a higher standard of morality than their own. There is a sort of inward anger at the raising of the average rate. And this of course all the more, if he who raised it has hitherto been on their own level; 'if he does this it will follow that we shall be expected to do as much.' And this anger is vented in various forms of persecution; not deliberately employed to hinder him, but bursting out as it were spontaneously, the outbreak of inward soreness. A Christian who may be surpassed in nobleness of conduct, in self-devotion, in truth, in courage by one whom he had hitherto deemed his inferior, will feel perhaps a generous shame; but he would indeed be cut to the heart if he were to detect himself in indulging envy, or anger, or mean jealousy. Such feelings belong to those who are seeking not the praise of God but the praise of men.

But are Christians quite safe from doing this great and sinful mischief? I fear not. In the first place, Christians are not exempt from that common failing of all men, but peculiarly common failing of our own day, to condemn and dislike everything which is unlike the ordinary fashion of their own lives. Any man who is led by his conscience to live differently from those around him is sure to annoy them, simply because he is different. And that may sometimes be a sore stumbling-block in his way.

Again, Christians are quite as liable as other men to be misled by the customs of their own society, and to

confound the laws that have grown up among themselves with the law of God. Every circle of men is in danger, and that not a slight danger of forming a peculiar code of morality quite distinct from, and sometimes even contrary to, the morality of the Bible or of reason, and of resenting any attempt to interfere with it as not merely annoying, but wrong; and if any one endeavours to set himself against it, of defending it not merely by argument and high example, but by persecution in various forms. These conventional codes are of use and must not lightly be set aside. But it is a dangerous thing if we let them enslave ourselves into defenders of them at all hazards and by all means.

Again, Christians are very often liable not, perhaps, to put obstacles into the way of efforts to do right so much as to refuse them the needful help, without which they have little chance of succeeding. To look coldly on while our fellows are struggling in the waves of this evil sea and never to hold out a hand or to say a word of encouragement, is very often the most cruel damper to all energy of repentance. The strong virtue that can go on its own way without being shaken by any ordinary temptation too often forgets the duty due to the weakness close to its side. By stern treatment of faults which were yet much struggled against, by cold refusal to acknowledge any except plainly successful efforts, by rejecting the approaches of those who have not yet learnt the right way, but are really wishing in their secret hearts to learn

it, those who are strong not unfrequently do much harm to those who are weak.

Again, Christians are quite as liable as any, in some cases more liable than any, to give wrong things untrue names, and to take away the fear of sin by a sort of good-natured charity towards particular faults. In all societies there will be peculiar temptations to particular faults, and since a fault is much worse when the temptation is little than when the temptation is great, it is unquestionably true that faults to which there are peculiar temptations are not so bad as others. And hence it is quite natural to make excuses for such faults, and to treat them much more leniently than they would in their own nature deserve. And all this is perhaps defensible. But then we go a step further and treat them lightly as if they were not in themselves faults of a deep dye at all. Now nothing lowers the standard of social morality more than this. It is a great duty to be charitable; to put the best possible construction on every one's conduct; to suspend the judgment and condemn no one unless the evidence be unanswerable; to allow all fair palliations of what is undeniably wrong. But it is a terrible perversion of charity if we extend it from the sinner to the sin, and allow a deed to be thought lightly of because we judge the doer leniently. We are bound by every means in our power to uphold the moral standard; to call sin by its right name; to condemn boldly and unhesitatingly sins which are common before our eyes, and never to allow our

gentleness towards the sinner to grow into softness or weakness in regard to the sin.

Lastly, Christians are liable to that which is the most common form of tempting amongst those who are not Christians; not to persecute or ridicule what is right, but to seek for companions in what is wrong. Christians, we all know too well, are tempted to do wrong often; nay, every day. And they are tempted to be not alone in doing it; for there are very few pleasures that we can enjoy to the full without the aid of others. And so they are tempted, whenever sin is too powerful for their own wills, to double it by dragging others with them on the same path. To go wrong oneself is sad enough; but to do precisely what the devil has always been doing, to drag souls towards hell, simply because we are going there, is too shocking to think of, and yet is one of the commonest faults.

Brethren, this week * we commemorate our Lord's consummation of His earthly work, the passion whereby He redeemed mankind. This week we commemorate the pains which it cost to set us free, the exceeding love which bore those pains. Side by side with this commemoration put the mischief that we do in spoiling all that work; in making those pains fruitless; in hardening the souls of our fellows against that love. Side by side with the Cross and the Garden of Gethsemane, put the sneer at a fellow-creature's efforts; the mocking laugh at his repentance;

* Preached on the Sunday before Easter.

the coldness that meets his struggles, and his instinctive wish for help; the seductions wherewith we lead him wrong, simply, that we may have companions. And say whether we can dare to call ourselves by the name of Christ, to come to Him for forgiveness, to ask Him to take us to His arms, as long as such sins as these stain our own lives and thwart His heavenly work.

SERMON XVII.

HELPING OTHERS.

GALATIANS vi. 2.

'Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ.'

THERE is a Christian duty which in its degree is incumbent upon all men, but is peculiarly the duty of members of a community, and yet which I think does not receive as much notice as it deserves,—the duty of helping one another to do right. Of course no one can put off his responsibility upon the shoulders of another. In this very passage from which the text is taken, the Apostle goes on a few verses further to guard against any possible mistake on the point by saying, 'Every man shall bear his own burden.' Yes, every man shall bear his own burden; when we are all called up before our Master's throne to hear His final judgments, we shall not be allowed to put the burden of our sins on our brethren; we shall not be allowed to say, 'I knew what was right; but I got no help, but rather hindrance, from all my neighbours and acquaintance, and so I did not

do it.' We shall not be allowed to plead that our fellow-men tempted us, still less that they did not guard us against temptation; we shall be told that we were sent into the world expressly to meet these temptations; and that we must be responsible for meeting them. The difficulties which friends or neighbours may have put in our way will only be reckoned as part of the very probation by which we are to be tried. We are not sent into the world to find everything quite smooth. Least of all things shall we find our duty smooth. And one of the difficulties in the way of doing our duty will assuredly arise from the companions among whom we have to pass a great part of our lives. So I say each man will have in that sense to bear his own burden. Yet that does not prevent the Apostle from saying, 'Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ.'

In fact, the truth in this matter is the precise counterpart of that which our Lord teaches us in regard to offences or stumbling-blocks. Our Lord says, 'That it must needs be that offences come, yet woe to that man through whom the offence cometh.' Just so it must needs be that men will neglect the plain duty of helping each other to be Christians, yet a duty it still remains. The neglect of it by one man will not be any excuse for another man's falling into sin; yet that neglect is itself a sin.

We are bound to bear one another's burdens. Let

me mention some ways in which we plainly can and ought to do this.

First, one great way in which we can help each other is by doing our own duties cheerfully. Cheerfulness does not seem at first sight so important as it really is. We are apt when we find our duties at all disagreeable to think that if we do them that is enough. But that is not enough: and there are two very good reasons why it is not enough. One is that if we do them sulkily or moodily we shall certainly not do them well. There is only one way that I know of to do duty well; and that is to do it as if you liked it. You cannot always like it; if you did, it would not be nearly so good for you as it is meant to be. If duty were always easy, we should never learn the hardness which is requisite in every soldier, but especially in a soldier of Jesus Christ. We cannot always like our duty; but we can always do it as if we liked it; and unless we do so we shall certainly not do it really well. That I say is one reason for being resolutely cheerful in whatever we have to do. The other is that which is founded on my text. There is nothing which gives a greater help to any one who is tempted to flinch from his duty, than to see others doing that very duty cheerfully and heartily: and there is nothing which proves a greater hindrance than to see others grumbling and sulky. It is for this reason, no doubt, that God has covered the world with materials for happiness; so that there is no age of life,

there is no season of the year, there is no condition of society, which has not appropriate means for enjoyment in great abundance. This enjoyment not only sweetens all good service to him who serves his Master faithfully, but contributes in an especial way to that fellowship in our common service, which Christ blessed and consecrated when He founded His Church. We might think it superfluous to exhort men to be happy; yet St. Paul's Epistles are full of such exhortations. He is perpetually bidding us rejoice. Rejoice, that is, in doing our Master's work; repress all discontented feelings; turn our thoughts resolutely to what is cheerful and right; for by so doing we contribute to make that work easier for all around us.

Again, we can help each other very much by being more especially careful to avoid joining in what is wrong. There is a sense in which we may say that he who does wrong in company is somewhat less to be blamed than he who does wrong alone; for very likely the temptation is very much greater. He feels perhaps very strongly drawn to do what others do, and finds it very difficult to stand alone; and there are many cases in which we all look upon this as a little palliation. But if we measure faults by the mischief that they do, whether to the doers or to other men, faults committed in company are among the very worst. Those who bear the chief part in such faults inflict on their companions the fatal injury of weakening their sense of shame, and hardening them in evil. To do wrong openly is at first

difficult, for conscience makes it very painful to avow a sin and defend it, or scorn those who rebuke it: but this pain soon wears out when we once get accustomed to see others looking on while we are doing wrong. But the injury of such faults to the chief doers is slight in comparison with that inflicted on the weaker spirits thus induced to sin. If we could only see our past lives with the eyes wherewith Christ beholds them, how many and how terrible should we find the wounds that we have inflicted in this way, often perhaps without knowing it. How many have been led into lying or bad language, into unseemly jesting, into sinful disobedience, simply because they found others willing to join them and shew them the way. How often has it happened that two coming together have done what neither would have done by himself. How often have two weak souls given each other strength in sinning, and by their union have laid the foundation for themselves of a life of deep unhappiness and a death perhaps worse than unhappy.

Yet, once more, we can do much to help those who are weaker than ourselves, whether from age, or position, or character, by avoiding what they are likely to misinterpret, and so to use to their own hurt. So, for instance, St. Paul tells the Corinthians that if he found his eating meat would lead his brother into sin, he would never eat meat again. They were often in difficulties in those days on this subject. According to the practice of the Heathens, a great deal of the meat that was sold in the market

had been formally offered to some idol; and many Christians feared that if they eat it they would be sharers in the idolatry. St. Paul himself had no such scruples; but he knew that it would be very hurtful to those who had, if they acted in disregard of them. So, rather than lead them into sin, he declared that he was ready to give up meat altogether. Precisely parallel cases are constantly occurring amongst ourselves. Particularly is this to be observed in regard to our common conversation. In the freedom of ordinary talk we are constantly liable to say things which, if rightly interpreted, are harmless, but which are very liable to be wrongly interpreted, and so to do much harm to those who hear them. Free words may often have an appearance of folly or levity, and may perhaps encourage others to real folly or levity, and perhaps to profaneness; a few words hardly meant at the time may encourage a weaker soul to disobedience, or to downright and gross sin. I do not say that we are to hold ourselves responsible for all the mischief that may possibly come out of our words; nor do I say that we are to push scruples of this sort so far as to interfere with our own Christian liberty. But I do say that we ought to bear in mind that whatever we say or do has an effect upon all around us, and that we are bound by the duty which we owe to each other as members of the Church of Christ to see that that effect be not evil. The real safeguard in such cases is to fill our hearts with the spirit of Christian uprightness and devotion, and then

we may be sure that any misinterpretation of what we are doing will be surely prevented by the impression produced by our general bearing. He whose whole life is inspired with Christian hopes of self-conquest, and Christian purposes of self-devotion, need not fear that a few chance words taken wrong will do grave mischief; but he who hangs but loosely to the service of Christ, and yet indulges himself in all the freedom that belongs to the Christian character, would do well to see whether he is not asserting that freedom before he has a right to it.

Once more, let me point out to you what is always painful to see, yet I fear is too generally true, that combination for evil is much more rapid than combination for good. And yet, if we are to help each other as Christians, we ought clearly to be ready to give that help with even more willingness than we are tempted to help each other in sinning. Combination for evil is so exceedingly natural, that unless we guard specially against it we are sure to slip into it. Those who do not choose to do what is right, instantly and instinctively band together against any one who stands out against them. And we are all liable to a little of the same spirit even if we do not definitely surrender our souls to it. We are all liable to feel somewhat angry at any one, who takes a different view of his duty from that which we take ourselves, and who by so doing tacitly reproves our conduct. We have a right, if our conscience supports us in doing

so, to act independently, and not to judge our conduct by another man's standard; but we have no right to be angry with another who does the same, and applies his own standard, and not ours, to his own conduct. Nothing, however, is more common than a sort of feeling that he who acts by a high standard is raising the measure for all of us, and must therefore be compelled to abandon his principles. Yet, in reality, he who truly raises the standard of general morality is doing the greatest conceivable service to his fellows; there is no service in the world for which all Christians ought to be more grateful. Clearly, then, if it is easy to combine for evil, it becomes an imperative duty to combine for good. And by combining for good, I mean readily and heartily recognising and supporting the efforts of any one who, in a cheerful simple manner, is endeavouring to do his plain duty. Such support may be given by words, may be given by resistance to anything like oppression, may be given by silently and simply copying the example. Whatever raises the tone of feeling amongst us, whatever contributes to make the right rather than the wrong the accepted thing to be done, whatever contributes to identify the code of honour, which will always rule in every society, with the law of God which ought to rule, is so much done in the way of combination for good. And such combination has power to save many an one from very painful falls, and perhaps from all manner of evil consequences.

I have spoken as if to Christians. Let no one say in reply that he has not yet so far advanced in his own repentance as to be able to help others. Let no one say that he must be better before he can take a part, even a quiet and unobserved part, in making others better. On the contrary, there is no duty which may not be made the gate of the road to Christ. Begin here, and you will find that this way leads, where all such ways always lead, to your Master's presence. Do not fear that you are unworthy to serve Him, for serving Him in any way is the sure means to make you more worthy. Do not say, 'I have myself to attend to, and that is enough;' for you cannot attend to yourself without attending to this. Look rather to see whether you have yet attended enough to this, and whether the want of attending to this be not the very cause that you are making no better progress in the purification of your own soul. For the central source of Christian life is the indwelling of the Spirit of Christ; now, the Spirit of Christ is the Spirit of One who gave Heaven, and the Throne of God, and a life on earth, and a death upon the Cross, all for a blessing on the race of men; and how shall we share His Spirit if we do nothing for our fellow-creatures?

SERMON XVIII.

CONFESSING OF FAULTS.

ST. JAMES v. 16.

'Confess your faults one to another.'

I AM not going to speak at length on the question of what good or what evil there may be in a systematic practice of confessing faults to a spiritual adviser. The system has been tried by the Church, and by our part of it deliberately abandoned: and before it was abandoned, it had left behind it such a sense of the mischief that it could do, that the very mention of it makes men angry. Even if under better regulations the system were desirable, it is for the present impossible, and not only impossible, but with men's feelings such as they are about it, positively mischievous. There is something in it under any circumstances hardly consistent with Christian liberty; and it is only when we remember our own personal weakness, our want of props and supports of every kind, our many falls and the mischief that has come of them, that we are tempted to think that perhaps we could tread our difficult path

better if we leant on another man's arm, and never walked alone at all. But if there be much to be said in its favour, experience has for the present condemned it unmistakeably. As far as we know of it, it does harm of the worst kind; even in the cases in which it does a great deal of good, it appears in the end to do still more harm than good.

But yet this practice was once universal in the Church. And we may be quite sure that nothing was ever an almost universal practice without containing within it some elements of good; and we are bound, whatever we may think of the practice in its bad state, to find out and to keep what is good in it. There must have been some very real need which this practice was fitted to satisfy. Men must have found in it some real help towards serving God and working out their own salvation. In all such cases, even if the practice be bad, the spirit and purpose out of which the practice originally grew, must be good, and that spirit we must preserve even when the practice is abolished.

That spirit is expressed in the text, 'Confess your faults one to another.'

These words imply, in the first place, that our religious life is not an isolated thing between each man and God, with which no other man has anything to do. All Christians are members of a Body. If they come much in contact they are nearly related members. And no one has a right to fancy that his faults concern himself

alone, and that no one else has any interest in his being a good man. It is true, that for the sake of Christian Liberty, there are few cases in which one man has a right to interfere with the faults of another; but it is not at all true that because no one has a right to interfere with us, therefore we need not regard any one, but simply ourselves in this matter. There are many faults for which you are not responsible to any authority but your own conscience; but among these faults far the larger part affect your neighbour as well as yourself; and though your neighbour has no right to interfere, you will have to answer to God for the mischief that your faults have done to that neighbour.

But this is not the only bond which binds us to our neighbour. The text implies further that we may get much help by being open about our faults. The Apostle goes on to say, 'Confess your faults one to another, and pray for one another, that ye may be healed.' Prayer is a means by which every one can help his neighbour, and prayer is not the only means, but only one amongst many. Our friends can give us sympathy; can sometimes give us advice; can always give us encouragement; very often a friend's experience will help out ours, and make us see more clearly than we could do alone what we ought to do.

But the chief benefit of being ready to confess faults which our conscience urges us to confess is, that we clear our own minds and strengthen our own wills. It makes

a wonderful difference in your power of avoiding a fault, and it makes a wonderful difference in the mischief which a fault can do to you, if you will only have the courage to tell it to some one who cares for you.

In the first place, a concealed fault has a most extraordinary power of infecting the whole character. It spreads its mischief far beyond itself. You do not pray so calmly or so simply, because this secret sin seems to mock your prayers. You do not go about your ordinary duties with any heart, because even if done, and well done, you feel as if they would be all spoilt by this one secret fall. You can have no enjoyment in religion, because your conscience mingles reproaches with all that you do. The fault may not really be half so bad as you fancy it. Yet because it is secret, it will take away all the springs of your desire to do right, and will rob your heart of its chief attraction towards God. The sin, while it is concealed, seems to enter into all that you think or do. It seems to be a part of yourself. You cannot say, 'It is not I that did it, but sin that dwelleth in me.' No, the fact of your concealing it seems to make it peculiarly your own. It is not your fault merely; it is you. And all that comes from you partakes of it. All this is changed the moment you have told it. The act of telling it seems as it were to circumscribe it within its own proper limits. It is wrong; but there is the whole of it, clearly in view. It no longer affects the rest of you or of your life. You have not

got rid of it by telling of it. But you have got rid of this infection which it formerly carried with it. You have shut it up within itself. You have separated yourself from it, and it from yourself. It has lost its power to taunt and mock. You need no longer feel that it is living and growing within you. You are still bound to be sorry for it; but you have no longer reason to fear it. While it is concealed, you feel like a hypocrite; you seem to be false, and whatever you do right only adds to this feeling; what business have you to do right, and pretend to be a servant of God, while you are secretly cherishing an unclean thing? But when the fault is confessed, you are a hypocrite no more, but a penitent.

Again, closely connected with this, is the fact that a concealed fault lays a peculiar and very heavy burden on the soul. The remorse which you feel every now and then for a secret fault is far beyond what you feel after you have told it. All men agree in this, that to tell a fault lightens the burden at once. And in extreme cases it has been found that great criminals have been driven even to face the gallows, in order to obtain this relief. The burden of a secret fault has been found to transcend in pain all other punishments that God's Providence brings on crime. Men have found it impossible to live without seeking this relief; and confession has almost always brought it. And this experience of great crimes is but the magnified experience of all faults,

however small. A secret fault always lays some additional burden on the soul, simply because it is secret. Over and above the remorse for the fault itself, the shame of having it hid in the heart, and unknown even to dear friends, always makes the hider feel as if he were acting a lie; and he despises himself in the midst of every word of praise that he may win.

Again, once more, confessing the fault pledges the will to try to prevent a return of it, and no other pledge is equally strong. The man who is hiding a secret fault says to himself, 'I will not tell of this, but I will never do it again.' I do not say this always fails; but it very often fails. The temptation returns stronger than before. He feels that to do twice what he has done once will not make much difference. It will not very much lower his self-respect, for that was already struck down by the first fault. It will not affect the respect in which others regard him; for they know nothing of what he has done, and of course he means them to know nothing of what he is now tempted to do. So the fault is repeated; and another temptation brings another fall. But when you have confessed a fault, you have by that very act put a barrier between yourself and the past. Next time the temptation comes, you have upon you the double check of your own conscience and of your professed resolution. The second fault seems not a slight addition merely to the first; but as if it would be an altogether new and much worse fall. You know your path. You are pledged

to it. And this knowledge, and this pledge, will certainly do much to uphold you. The resolution of the man who is hiding within him the memory of wrong is sure to be weak, wavering, fitful. The resolution of the man, whose repentance has been stamped and marked by confession, is clear and strong. However weak he feels, he feels, too, that he knows what he has to do and means to do it.

And all this applies particularly to secret faults, which are hidden from all eyes but those of the doers. But much of it applies also to faults which are not hidden; but being known to all who know us intimately, yet are not confessed to be faults. There is a great difference between the repentance which simply endeavours to change, and that which not only endeavours to do so, but openly yet humbly confesses that it means to do so. There is often a foolish pride which makes men, even when they know they have done wrong and mean to do right, yet very unwilling to acknowledge that they have done wrong. They will do right for the future, but they need not say anything about the past. By this pride they cut themselves off from all the help which Christian sympathy could give. Of course very often the best way of confessing that you were in the wrong is to do right for the future, and leave your confession to be understood from that. But this always implies that you do not defend the past, that you do not wear the manner of one who acknowledged no charge, that

you do not foolishly gloss over your change of conduct, by talking of it as if it were merely a new whim of your own instead of an endeavour to obey your conscience.

Two questions remain: To whom you should confess your faults? and how? And both of these questions must be left very much to your own judgment. As a general rule, it may be said that one great duty of intimate friends is to supply each other with that help which Christian sympathy can give. A man has almost always among his friends some one, to whom he would not be utterly unwilling to tell all that lies on his own conscience. There may be some matters that require more experienced advice. There are some confessions which we are bound to make, not for the sake of ourselves and for our own spiritual improvement, but for the sake of justice: thus, for instance, if you have either purposely or unintentionally slandered your neighbour falsely, it is to himself that you are bound to make the confession. All these points must be left to your own decision.

So, again, it must be left to your own judgment how you will confess a fault. Nothing is more mischievous than to confess it in any such way as to give yourself a pleasure in doing so. It is peculiarly mischievous to take such an opportunity for indulging your love for talking about yourself. And you may be sure that to confess faults is always wrong, when you are

conscious that it is in some way not unpleasant to do so. Analysing your own character, talking about it, confessing not your acts or words but your feelings, confessing what you are not really ashamed to confess, confessing trifles as if they were serious sins: all these are very weak and mischievous forms of egotism. What you will sometimes need to confess (and it will only be sometimes) are deeds or words; definite acts of the will; such as you feel to be a burden to you, such as you fear to have detected, such as make you feel ashamed to be praised, or esteemed, or liked.

If you ever have a secret burden of this sort, if you have done wrong and it weighs upon you, if you feel that it would be a relief no longer to carry your evil recollection hid within your own soul, do not flinch from seeking the help that St. James points out. The first authority to whom we are bound to confess is God. But often that confession is not enough. We are not yet in God's immediate presence. He is hid from us behind the veil of our mortal flesh. It is with men that we are living, and it is to men that we have to discharge most of our duties, even our duties to God, and it is from men that we have to obtain most of the help that we get, even that help which God gives. And for this reason it is that God has given such strength to the honest truth of character, which will walk uprightly before his fellow-men, and will be true in their sight. It is something to be quite true and open, even to one

fellow-creature. It is something to tear off every mask and shew your real self, even though there is but one man by to see you. To such truth God gives special strength; on such Christian friendship God bestows especial blessing.

SERMON XIX.

GOD'S PRESENCE.

PSALM CXXXIX. 1—3.

'O Lord, Thou hast searched me and known me. Thou knowest my down-sitting and up-rising; Thou understandest my thoughts afar off. Thou compassest my path and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways.'

THE fact that God is always present and knows every minute trifle in our lives, and that His unerring judgment will assuredly take count of every detail of our character and our conduct, neither exaggerating nor omitting, but applying absolute justice; this truth is one of those which lose force from their very universality. We are very much influenced by the presence or absence of our fellow-creatures. We have often much to conceal from them, and we would often make great efforts to prevent their knowing much of our lives. We are keenly sensible to the pain of having any faults exposed to their view which are not already known. We are checked by the fear of exposure from indulging in other faults, into which we should otherwise probably plunge. We are put on our

guard by the nearness of other eyes and ears; and there are many faults which we never dream of committing if others be looking on. But we feel no such fear of exposure before God, and we are little checked by the knowledge that He sees and understands all that we do, or say, or think. And indeed it is obvious that fear of exposure must be out of the question; how can we any longer fear exposure before One who knows all already? But that we should be so little checked, so little awed, in the course of our daily lives by this perpetual and awful presence; that we should know God to be looking at every motion and every impulse, and should be so unmoved; that we should do so many things before God's face, which the opening of a door and the entrance of a fellow-creature would instantly stop; this is an instance of that weakness of faith which proves the fall of man.

There is no need to exaggerate in this matter. We may recognise to the full that it is a part of God's own ordinance that we should be, as it were, unconscious of His presence during the greater part of every day of our lives. He has plainly made us so. We become unconscious of everything by long use. Our very bodily senses are quite capable of being so dulled by perpetual repetition of some one sight, or sound, or feeling, as to perceive it no more. And in the same way, if we live perpetually in any presence of any kind, we become at last so familiarized with it that our natural character comes into play almost as if it were not there. Not only

is this God's ordinance, but we can see why He has made us so. For we could never discharge our duties properly, if we were liable to be perpetually distracted by the consciousness of what was around us: and, above all, we might be daunted by the perpetual thought of the presence of God, and so be paralysed instead of helped. If we could keep full before our minds this awful remembrance, it would make it very difficult indeed to do every little duty just as it came; it would make it not only difficult but impossible, weak as we are, to indulge quite unrestrainedly in that mirth and cheerfulness which God has bestowed for the plain purpose of making our duties easier and smoother.

There is, therefore, nothing wrong in our forgetting that we are in the presence of God any more than there is anything foolish in our forgetting that we need air to breathe or light to see by, or that if we fall we may hurt ourselves: just in the same way as we very often, and quite rightly, forget that we are in the company of men who will take notice of our faults. In fact, the innocent and pure heart is the first to forget the presence of any kind of check on its conduct, because to an innocent and pure heart the presence or absence of others makes very little difference. It is quite right to forget that you are in God's presence, just as it is quite right to forget that you are in the presence of father or mother, as, no doubt, you often do when you are in that presence.

But that which is quite peculiar in this case is the nature of the forgetfulness. In the presence of father or of mother, or of any one else for whom you care, though you forget, yet the slightest real temptation, still more the slightest open sin, is sure to put you instantly in remembrance. You talk, and laugh, and jest quite freely, though a parent or an older friend be by, without thinking particularly of the presence of any one who has a right to check you. But the moment you have said or done what ought not to have been said or done, or even have been tempted to say or do so, you are awake instantaneously and quite conscious of the presence that you had forgotten. There is, as it were, a secret fence around you which you never see till you come quite close to it, or, perhaps, till you actually touch it. But though you do not see it, it is always there, and seems to start up full before your eyes just at the moment when you were going to stray. We forget, but we generally manage to remember at the precise moment when remembering is wanted. The mere fact of approaching the forbidden limits reminds us of those limits, and though we seem to forget, there is a latent consciousness ever ready to act if it be called upon.

Now, I fear, there is no such perpetual readiness in us to remember the presence of God. We forget His presence in the absorption of our daily employments and amusements. And forgetting it we approach some sin which we know that He has forbidden. But our approach

to the forbidden path rarely puts us in mind of the awful eye that is ever silently marking our steps. We actually sin; we sin in a way that would instantly awake us, and cover us with painful shame, if we had been all the time in the company of a fellow-creature. But we awake not to the presence of our God. We experience no sense of immediate confusion at having proved our folly and sin in His very presence. There is little of the keen pain which attends the knowledge that another eye was secretly looking on while we went wrong. We do not blush to find how we have done wrong in His very sight. Our forgetfulness lasts on through our sin, and very often only disappears when detection has brought human eyes, and not God's only, to witness our disgrace.

This, I say, is not merely the working of that nature which God bestowed on us. It is a weakness, and a weakness which we ought not to indulge in. It is a veil which the devil puts before our eyes. It is the blindness of our fallen state. And if we are Christians, it is a weakness and blindness quite inconsistent with our calling.

The right state of mind plainly is, to have the thought of God's presence so perpetually at hand, that it shall always start before us whenever it is wanted. So that, whenever we are on the point of doing or saying anything cowardly, or mean, or false, or impure, or proud, or conceited, or unkind, the remembrance that God is looking on shall instantly flash across us and help us

to beat down our enemy. This is living with God. This is the communion with Him, and with Christ, which unquestionably helps the struggling, the penitent, the praying, more than anything else we can attain unto. We cannot be always in the presence of our fellow-men. It is not good for us to be so, chiefly because then they prevent us from ever being quite dependent on ourselves and on God. But when no one else is by, or no one who can or will check our faults, then, above all other times, this recollection of God's presence is most needed. From His presence we cannot escape. If we go down to Hell we shall find Him there; if we climb up into Heaven He is there also. And whenever we are left to govern ourselves, we are so left in order that we may be all the more unchecked by any presence except His, and that we may learn to walk by His laws even when none but Himself can see whether we are keeping them or not.

And this perpetual though not always conscious sense of God's presence would, no doubt, if we would let it have its perfect work, gradually act on our characters just as the presence of our fellow-men does. We cannot live long with men without catching something of their manner, of their mode of thought, of their character, of their government of themselves. Those who live much in a court acquire courtly manners. Those who live much in refined and educated society acquire refinement insensibly. Those who are always hearing pure and high

principles set forth as the guides of life, learn to value and to know them even faster than they can learn to live by them. From the just we learn justice; from the charitable we catch an infection of charity; from the generous we receive the instinct of generosity. So, too, by living in the presence of God and, as it were, in the courts of Heaven, we shall assuredly learn something of a heavenly tone, and shake off some of that coarse worldliness, that deeply ingrained selfishness, that silly pride and conceit which now spoils our very best service.

But the efforts of perpetually endeavouring to remember God's presence go very much beyond mere manner of thinking and tone of mind. This habit, beyond all others, strengthens our faith. For we believe much more easily what we are familiar with than what is strange to us. Strange things make us incredulous by their very strangeness, quite independent of the evidence for them or against them. And as long as God is very strange to our thoughts, we find it very hard to believe in Him in any real sense, very hard, indeed, to live by His laws, harder still to love Him. St. John reminds us that it is much more difficult for us to love that which we do not know than that which we do: 'If a man love not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?' And so we may go on still further, and ask how still harder must it be to love God whom we never think on? The less we think about God and remember His nearness to us at every moment of our

lives, the more do we make Him a stranger to us, and ourselves strangers to Him. Our prayers become more formal and mechanical, as addressed to One with whom we have little in common; our quickness of perception about what He will approve or disapprove becomes blunted, because we seem not to know Him, or the expression of His countenance; we are removed far off, and the life which should flow from Him to us is tardy in coming. We believe; but we believe weakly, coldly, hesitatingly. We know that there is another world; but we care little about it, because we seem to know little about it. We slip more and more into the habit of measuring right and wrong, not by God's pure will, but by the voice of the society in which we live, by the demands of our personal interests, even by strong wishes of our own hearts, wishes which are only strong because we have never looked at them fully with the sense of God's eye watching us while we did so.

In short, to live with God is to be perpetually rising above the world; to live without Him is to be perpetually sinking into it, and with it, and below it. And lest the presence of God should be too much for us, Christ has taken human nature on Him, and has provided that He will be always with us as long as the world shall last. It is not the unbending majesty of a law of holiness, it is an eye which is full of the sympathy of humanity, that sees every step and every thought, and yet can make allowance for every weakness, and would now fain be

our daily companion. How shall we learn to walk by His side?—No doubt by regular prayer, and by frequent reminders of His presence. The daily prayer in the closet, the endeavour to keep the attention fixed when praying with others, either in our regular services or in family worship, the regular habit of reading the Bible at a fixed time, the occasional reminders of ourselves that God is looking on,—these are our chief means of learning to remember His presence. But yet there is another, not less powerful than any, which deserves still more special mention. Our hearts will put us in mind of God's eye being upon us every now and then involuntarily. The thought will flash across us that God sees us. And this will generally be just when we are tempted to do wrong, or perhaps just when we are actually beginning to do so: some secret sin of which no one knows or dreams perhaps, some self-indulgence, which we dare not deny that God condemns. Then is the moment to choose whether or not we will live in the presence of God; then, when the finger of conscience is pointing to Him, and saying, 'He is looking at you.' Then if you persist in doing wrong even in the very presence of your God; then if you shut your eyes and go just as you were going, in spite of being warned that His eye beholds you; then, assuredly, do you disable your conscience from reminding you. Persist in so doing once or twice, and conscience will certainly at last omit the useless warning, and you will lose your best oppor-

tunity to lift your soul above the mire and clay into which it has fallen. You will go on sinning, insulting the majesty of God by sinning, though you know Him to be seeing you, but not touched by any sense of your sin, because, when you were warned, you refused repeatedly to listen. Let us not despise these momentary impulses, these voices that come from afar, these distant echoes of the sounds of Heaven. Let us not be deaf when we suddenly hear the call that Christ is at our door, that God is in our chamber; let us turn quickly from the sin, and remember our Master.

SERMON XX.

RESIGNATION.

ST. MATT. vi. 10.

'*Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.*'

THIS prayer, as our Lord has taught us by His own example, ought to accompany and to penetrate all other prayers. We are taught the efficacy of prayers. We are taught that our Father invariably hears all our petitions, and not only hears them, but is as willing to grant them as a father is willing to grant the prayers of his children. 'What man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone? or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent?' And when we are told this we cannot but be struck with the difficulty, how can God grant all the prayers of such weak and blind creatures as we are? If we ask what is mischievous to our fellow-creatures, if we ask what is mischievous to ourselves, is it to be supposed that God will still grant the prayer? If in our ignorance we were to ask for what would ruin our souls, are we to suppose that His love would incline Him

to give it? No, surely. God will hear every prayer of an earnest heart. He will hear it as a father hears the prayers of a loved child. And that prayer will assuredly have weight with Him. But He will grant it just as a father would grant it, with the outpouring of His love, and not always with the mere hard fulfilment of our foolish wishes. Our Lord has expressed a sense of this in the prayer which He has given to us to use. He has also expressed it in the prayer which He once used Himself. For He, too, once felt a human longing for something which it was not good for Him to have. He prayed that the cup which His Father was holding to His lips might pass from Him. Yet He forthwith added, 'Not My will but Thine be done.' So, too, is every Christian prayer filled with the same thought. And if it ever occurs to us to complain that our Lord's words are not literally fulfilled, and that we do not always find our prayers answered exactly as we offer them, here is the solution of the difficulty. Our Lord gave this promise to Christians. He presumes that the prayers are Christian prayers. He does not mean, and cannot mean, that any wishes that may enter our weak hearts will be satisfied. But He means that every Christian prayer, offered in a Christian spirit, shall assuredly find its answer, as assuredly as the prayer of a child would meet with an answer from a father.

Of course it is possible to say at once, what is the value of such a promise as this? It would be something

to be quite sure that you would have everything that you asked for; but it appears that you are sure of nothing. If you ask for what it does not please God to give, it will not be given. How, then, does the promise help you? A man who makes this objection in a scoffing spirit simply proves that the promise was never made to him at all. It is made to those who would approach God as children; children who, though they have wishes, yet still love their Father better than anything else; better than any wish that they can form. It is not made to those who put their own wishes above even their love of their God. But if the objection occur to any man who loves God, but is perplexed by receiving a promise which cannot be literally fulfilled, let him think a little, and he will see how large, how gracious a promise is yet made, even when we see that the literal meaning of it is not intended.

For our God is the Ruler not of one small circle only, but of the whole universe. How natural it would be to think, that in guiding this vast machine there could be no place left for caring about the wishes or the happiness of any individual being in it. How natural it would be to say, 'God surely cannot take thought of me, an insignificant unit among His creatures. He will govern the whole for the happiness of the whole; but if the happiness or the well-being of millions requires the sacrifice of me and of my happiness, how can I expect that His eye will notice me, or that if His eye notice, He will spoil all for my sake.' It is natural to say this or to think this, because

we think of God as a colossal man, whose powers, though unbounded in degree, are yet like ours in their kind. And certainly if a man, be he infinitely wise and infinitely good, had to govern the universe, it would seem sometimes inevitable that he must sacrifice the interests of individuals to the interests of the whole body.

But if we take such fancies into our minds, if the apparently ruthless march of events in the world's history seems sometimes to thrust us and our concerns all out of sight, here is the answer. God is not a man, to whom there is a difference between great and small. He can, and He alone can, reconcile the happiness, the holiness, the true interest of every soul with the real good of the whole; and though He is ruling the world, He is still the Father, and the loving Father, of every one of us. That yearning prayer which brings us nearer to Him, because it expresses our dependence on Him, shall assuredly be satisfied, even if it appear to be refused. A day will come when we shall look back on all the prayers which have gone up from our inmost hearts, and shall see that even those which have been most plainly denied have yet been, wonderful to say, most plainly granted. We shall see that, had we known what we then shall have learnt, precisely that very thing has been done which our consciences would have bid us pray for; and that our prayer, so far from being unheard, has been treasured up in the counsels of God. It is this; this tender regard for each man's own longings, own wants; this watching over the

movements and the needs of every separate soul; this fatherly care; this never-sleeping love; which Christ promises in His Father's name. We know not precisely what is best for us. We know not what will make us truly happy. We know not what will help us best in our struggle against temptations. And if *we* were to try to make a distinction between our mere passing wishes and that which our souls really needed, we should utterly fail. But we need not try. Let us take all our wishes, all our longings, all the promptings of our consciences, to the feet of our Father. He will hear and He will do. He will hear all we say. He will know what parts of our prayer are best for us to have, and what are not. And He will give us what His Fatherly love will choose. And therefore to all our prayers we will add, 'Thy will be done in earth, as it is in Heaven.'

For this is the corresponding feeling on our parts. The answer to absolute care and infinite love is absolute resignation and absolute trust. The resignation and the trust are bound together. We must be resigned because we trust. There is a resignation conceivable which simply expresses the despair of a creature in the hands of a Being, a Law, mightier than himself. 'I will be resigned because all struggle is hopeless, and I will not fight against what is inevitable.' Such might be the resignation of one who believed that all things were governed by a fixed fate, regardless of all but its own certain course; or of one who believed that all things were the sport of

chance, and contained no spark of intelligence to guide them. But our resignation is the resignation of children absolutely trusting a Father Who knows us, and knows what is best for us, and whose love guides even His wisdom. The certainty that is given to us if we will make it our own is, that every wish we utter has an answer in His Fatherly heart, and that, having uttered it, we may contentedly leave it in the hands of Him who has thus received it.

Now this doctrine is not hard to accept. We are not, perhaps, unwilling to welcome the thought that God is our Father, and that He loves us, and that He hears us when we pray, and that if He will not give us our prayer because it is not good for us, He yet will not disregard it, but that in some way or other it will be answered. But to accept such a doctrine, and to live by it, are very different things; and to keep our minds quite cheerful and contented when we are suffering from heavy disappointments or trials is not easy. To say, 'Thy will be done,' is not hard when that will is merely thought of; but it is very hard when we seem to be suffering from it.

It is very hard often to believe that temptations are good for us, when we meet with them, and fall before their attacks. Our consciences reprove us for yielding. But we put off the burden of our guilt upon the temptation, and complain that we should have been tried so sorely. Especially is this the case with sudden and violent

temptations, which assail us unexpectedly, just when we had made many good resolutions and had fancied ourselves safe; or, again, with small but numerous temptations, which beset our path and seem to make escape from them an impossibility. Then, when we have fallen, we are apt to get discontented with our place, and to feel as if Providence had not treated us fairly. We say that we have not had a fair chance. We look with envy on others whose trials are not so visible as ours, or it may be (for who can settle such a point?) not really so severe as ours. We fancy that we alone have these impulses to wrong; we alone fall into such tempting opportunities to sin; we alone are hampered and fettered, and cannot tell how to get free; we alone have longings which we cannot gratify rightly, while others can; we alone do not get the sympathy that our nature needs. And when we feel all this it is sometimes hard to say, in the sense in which our Lord meant us to say it, 'Thy will be done in earth, as it is in Heaven.' It is hard to accept what Providence gives, to use it to the very utmost for our spiritual needs, and then to say, I am quite certain that this is of all things that could happen the very best for me. I cannot see it, but I am certain of it; for I am in the hands of a Father who governs all things and loves me.

And so again it is very often hard when not our spiritual growth, but our immediate happiness is marred, to be able to say at once, 'Thy will be done.' Disappointments in our wishes for our own pleasure do not perhaps

perplex us so much as trials which have caused our fall; but they try us keenly for all that. To have some dreadful thing happen to ourselves or to those whom we love, to have a very painful thought ever present to the mind the moment our attention is not occupied by what is before our eyes, to bear a dead weight about, which cannot be quite forgotten even when it is not quite consciously remembered, this may sometimes be the lot of a Christian, and may make it very hard for him to say, with full and entire resignation, 'Thy will be done.' And even short of this there are sure to be many trials of this kind which are quite capable of trying our faith, and if our faith fails, of souring our temper. Not to get what you had set your heart upon, to see another obtain what you had hoped for yourself, to find others more highly appreciated, and yet, as it seems to you, without fair reason, to find others more successful, to be tormented with all kinds of unsatisfied longings, perhaps for more affection than you get, perhaps for more trust, perhaps for more praise, perhaps for more distinction,—these are common trials, but they are hard to bear. For when they come on us, the duty of cheerful and hearty resignation is plain. But it is more plain than it is easy. To believe at such times that still God is watching over you and giving you what, if you would use it rightly, is best for you, is very hard. Rather it is natural to take refuge in a kind of heathenism; and if we do not go so far as to complain of God's Providence, yet we complain of the course of

things, and feel sore and discontented instead of feeling submissive and resigned.

For this duty of resignation is peculiarly a duty of faith. If we look simply out on the world, we shall certainly not find that God's ways are made so plain, that all who watch can see the guidance of His hand. I do not promise that either in your own life, or in that of others, you will ever be able to trace the truth which St. Paul teaches us, namely, that all things work together for good to them that love God. There is enough, no doubt, to indicate the truth; and especially in the inner and secret experience of his own life will each man find, if he chooses, plain marks that God has been guiding him. He will see, if he look back and observes closely, times when mere accident kept him from a fearful fall into some dangerous sin, times when a change in his outer circumstances came just in time to save him from being hardened in some evil habit, times when a word from the Bible, or from God's ministers, exactly suited his need, times when a new friend or a new teaching opened his soul just when it was wanted, times when some sin was mercifully detected, times too, perhaps, when it was mercifully hidden. Such experiences as these every Christian has; but they are enough to support faith, not enough to give it. The doctrine ultimately rests, not on such experiences, blessed as these experiences assuredly are, but on the ever-deepening sense that God is our Father, and that no Father ever loved children more than He loved us.

Thus it is that whether we are tried with pain and unhappiness, or with besetting temptations, we shall be able still to rest in the everlasting arms of our Father's never-wearied love. We shall say when allurements to sin beset us, that since, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, much more being reconciled shall we be saved from sin by His life. We shall say, when we are unhappy, that God chastiseth every one whom He receiveth. And however clear it may be that His will is not what we think happiest for ourselves at the time, nor indeed, so far as we can see, at all, He will give us strength to say, 'Thy will be done in earth, as it is in Heaven.'

SERMON XXI.

PREPARATION FOR LEARNING.

ST. LUKE viii. 15.

'*But that on the good ground are they, which, in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience.*'

THE parable of the Sower, which we read in the Gospel this morning, is the beginning of parables. It stands out from all the rest as the beginning of a new and higher method of teaching. Before that our Lord had not veiled His meaning. There is nothing like a parable in the Sermon on the Mount. And it was so new to His Disciples that they asked Him why He taught in this way, and what His parable meant? There are no such questions afterwards; this parable and the parable of the Tares, which immediately follows it, are the only ones which are accompanied with an explanation. I suppose, that, after that, the Disciples had caught the meaning of the new method of teaching and needed explanations no longer.

Nor is it a mere accident that this parable stands first. It is the natural preface to all parables, and, indeed, to all teaching. The parable of the Sower is the guide to what we all have to expect when we set ourselves to learn or to teach. It is true of other subjects besides God's truth; as true of mathematics or of history as it is of religion and the religious character. And so Christ has made it the beginning of that part of His teaching which especially refers to His kingdom; for His kingdom, the Kingdom of Heaven, is the subject of all the parables without exception, and even where it is not mentioned, is always understood. And if among all that we assemble here to learn, there is one subject which stands out above all the rest; one lesson which is not merely to be learnt by you, but by me also, and by all who hear me—namely, the knowledge of God and of Christ, and of the Kingdom of Christ, this parable is the fitting introduction to it.

This parable is addressed to all whose consciences are alive enough ever to speak to them. There are, no doubt, unhappy creatures, strange mystery that it should be so, who are not touched by this parable, because the truth of God has never really reached their ears, much less their understanding. Men brought up in utter ignorance; with their natural affections stifled by early sin, or, at any rate, never warmed to a Diviner fire than can be seen in the natural affections of brute animals; living ever among examples of vice; on such as these we cannot say that

the Sower of the seed of God has ever scattered His heavenly gift. But all we the rest, wherever, or however, or whenever we have learnt that there is a difference between right and wrong, we know, and we cannot deny, that the seed has reached our souls.

The Sower is the Providence of God. There may be many instruments employed by Him; teachers whose duty it is to interpret and enforce the Scriptures; parents, and tutors, and guardians, whose duty it is to guide the steps, to warn from temptation, to impress by punishment the lessons which conscience has already uttered in vain, companions whose example and opinions are ever being poured into our minds. But these are all instruments. Of them all may be said what St. Paul said of himself and of Apollos: 'I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase.' The real Sower is the Providence of God. The God who governs all things in a wonderful order has filled the world with lessons which reach us without our seeking them; and perpetually our hearts respond, and we see what is right, and we feel a power commanding us to do it. Every such warning within, every such inviting or forbidding whisper, is the sound of the seed of God falling on the heart. You are quietly sinking to sleep at night; it suddenly flashes across you that you have neglected a duty, and that you ought to attend to it the first thing in the morning; you remember that you have been untrue or unkind, or have led a companion into sin,

and you feel that you ought to set this right at whatever cost to yourself, either of pain or disgrace. You are reading the Bible, and you meet with some sentence which precisely hits yourself, and shews you how you are wrong, and how you ought to set yourself right. You are talking with a friend, or working at something you have to do, or engaged in some active game, and in the very midst of it an unwelcome thought comes in, and demands obedience to a most unpleasant command of duty. What are all these thoughts which come to us so unbidden? They are the seed of God falling on the soil of our hearts. Sometimes we seem to see the hand that scatters them; we are listening to a teacher or a preacher, and his words reach us. But I think more often we never see the hand at all. But the seed falls, and we recognise it.

We recognise it. For the seed of God is quite unlike any other. A new truth of politics, of language, of mathematics, is never like this. Nay, we may have new truths in religion suddenly made plain to our understandings; new, that is, to us, though old enough in themselves; and yet they will not be at all like the seed of Heaven. The seed of Heaven, when it enters the soul, is ever accompanied with a peculiar pain, a peculiar pleasure. It seems to belong to itself, and to be of the same kind with nothing else. It does not go to the intellect, but to the conscience. It does not affect the speculations except indirectly, but it affects the life. All other truths

I feel to be as it were subordinate to myself; I cannot alter them, but I can use them. I learn mathematics, and whatever I learn I know to be fixed, unchangeable, absolute. But my soul does not bow down. I guide myself by these truths, but I do not feel that they rule my life and being. I make them my servants; I buy and sell by them; I guide ships by them; I make machines by them. Or, again, I learn politics; but political truths, though they are lofty in their nature, are still not supreme over my conscience. I learn that men are governed by such and such instincts; that they require such and such guidance; that they pursue such and such paths. And in learning all this I reverence the God that made man so fearfully and wonderfully; but here, too, I feel that all this learning is under me, not over me; and that when I have got it, I am to use it as I use a lamp or a compass, but, if need be, even to defy it. I learn the laws of physical science. I learn that some drug is a poison, and having learnt that fact, of course I am forbidden by my knowledge to swallow the drug. But yet a case may arise when, in defiance of the physical law, I shall swallow it; some imperative duty may interfere, and I shall set the physical law at defiance, and die with my eyes open. Thus, I say, all other truths are subordinate to myself. But not so the truth of God. I cannot use this truth; I must obey it. I cannot guide my steps by it, in order to rise to something else. I must submit to it for its own sake. It is above me. And as

it enters the soul, I feel a reverence for its voice which I cannot feel for any other voice.

Such is the nature of the seed, and the parable tells us why it does not always grow. The parable does not speak of those whom it does not reach. You will not be touched by this parable on account of truths which have sounded in your ears, or have flashed before your eyes, but have never touched your conscience. You need not distress yourself with fearing that want of understanding will be a ground for condemning you. The parable speaks only of those whose consciences are touched; of those who have felt and heard within their souls, warnings, and whispers, and faint calls, and passing stings of remorse, and wishes for liberty; of those who have done wrong and been reproved for it, have been in temptation and have been warned by conscience against it, have felt occasional doubts whether their careless, idle neglect of duty were quite right. To such as these the parable speaks, and tells them why the seed fell in vain. Look back, and remember any warning your conscience gave you; remember any prayer that you made for help; remember any good resolution that you made; every instance that you can remember was a seed from heaven. Has it grown? If it has not, the parable will tell you why.

It tells us three causes which prevent or injure the growth of the heavenly seed: the careless heart, the shallow character, the divided mind. You felt the touch

of the heavenly seed; your conscience pricked you; no one can mistake the sting of conscience for anything else, and you knew at the time that you ought to listen. But your careless heart trampled down the thought, and would not let it take root, or turned away and left the next passing imagination to pick it up. Or, again, you seemed not quite so bad. The warning of conscience did move you; move you much, perhaps to tears, to passionate resolutions, to prayers, to more fervour than a more confirmed Christian would have shewn. But it had no depth. Some temptation came across you, and forthwith all your resolutions seemed gone into the distant past, half-forgotten, seen through a mist, dim, faint. You slip back and feel no shame at your own weakness. Or, once more, you seemed better still. The seed did grow. It took real, perhaps deep, hold of your soul. But you had in that soul so much besides; so many other hopes, so many other aims, so many other delights. The heavenly seed is not killed; you do not lose all sense of religion; but the seed is choked and becomes unfruitful: a barren, useless, weak religion is the only produce of the divided mind.

These three are the causes that God's seed often does not prosper. These are the causes why, in spite of all the lessons that are poured into our souls, we do not learn. And so the world abounds with men who have been taught much, and taught by God Himself, and yet have learnt little or nothing: men who have had the

finest opportunities of being great and noble characters, and have become weak, and poor, and selfish souls: men whose history might seem to have marked them out for lights to all their fellows, and who have ended with losing even the light that was needed for themselves. Every trial that we pass through is capable of being the seed of a noble character. Every temptation that we meet in the path of duty is another chance of filling our souls with the power of Heaven. Every inspiration to do right, however trivial it may seem, is sent to us directly from Him Who sows the word of God. But there is not a man living who has not to blame himself for wasting many such seeds in his carelessness, his shallowness, his double-mindedness. And there are some, and they not a few, who have allowed but very few to grow out of many that they have received.

Now this parable then should be the preface to our life, as it is the preface to our Lord's teaching about our life. Here are the three things that we have to guard against: the careless heart, the shallow character, the divided mind. And here is the picture of what we ought to be: 'they which in an honest and good heart, having heard the Word, keep it and bring forth fruit with patience.' Can we make ourselves all this at once? No; but we can do much towards it. It is just in these preparations for the work of life that a resolute determination is of real value. You cannot make your

heart honest and good as the parable requires. But the resolution to do your best towards it will do a great deal towards it. Resolve to be honest with yourself, and not to throw away the messages of God, which will come to you day after day. Resolve not to stifle your conscience, when it happens to command what is not pleasant for you to do. Resolve not to let yourself cool down from the warmth of your first hopes; but when you find yourself sinking back, to hold steadfastly to what you determine in the day of fervour. Resolve not to let any other thought be higher with you than the thought of duty. Prepare your heart in this way, and you may be sure that your preparation will not be lost; for God blesses such preparations as these, and Christ assuredly did not tell us this parable simply to give us some interesting information on the causes why the heavenly seed so often failed, but because He would have us take care that it do not fail. Thus shall we work out our own salvation; for it is God that worketh in us both to will and to do.

SERMON XXII.

THE DISCIPLINE OF TEMPTATION.

ST. JAMES i. 12.

'*Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love Him.*'

We pray that we may not be led into temptation; and in using that prayer we acknowledge that it is an imperative duty not to go into temptation. And our Lord speaks more strongly of avoiding temptation than of almost any other duty, bidding us even cut off the right hand or pluck out the right eye, if the right hand or the right eye shall have proved a temptation. And our own experience agrees with this; and in too many instances where we have fallen, we are compelled to confess that we might have avoided the fall by avoiding the temptation. In fact, this is the chief mark which distinguishes the veteran soldier of the Cross from the novice; that the former never wastes his strength and perils his service by going into needless temptation. All this is so. And we cannot too often repeat it, or too vehemently

drive it down into our inmost hearts, and make it the undeviating rule of our lives. But still temptations are not scattered all about us without a purpose. And if it is true on the one side that we have no right to run into temptations, so is it true on the other hand that temptations are the necessary discipline of our lives. As far as we can see, it is by temptations that we are educated. I do not mean that God could not educate us in any other way if He thought fit to do so; nor even that He does not educate some men altogether, and all men, in some degree, without temptations. But the exceptions are not to the point. It is quite certain that the ordinary discipline provided for the soul is the discipline of temptation. If two men hold precisely the same principles, and mean to act in precisely the same way, and if one has been tempted to forsake those principles, and has withstood the temptation, and the other has never been tempted at all, then the principles and character of the two are in reality quite different. I do not mean merely that you do not yet know whether the untempted man is thoroughly sincere or not. I mean more than that. I mean that the passage through temptation actually makes a change in a man. The very same principles which he held before he was tempted he may, to all appearance, hold still; but though they are the same in form, and if you were to put them into words, you would have to put them into the same words, they are not the same in reality. The passage through

the fire of temptation has ennobled—has sanctified them. In passing through temptation we grow. The temptation may not have shaken us from the place where we had taken our stand. But though it has not shaken us, it has not left us as it found us. We are different from that day forward; it may be very different; it may be not more than slightly different; but for certain really different. And this, as far as we can see, is, as I said, an appointed education. To pass through temptations, never seeking them, never yielding to them; never seeking them, for that would be downright rashness, or even treason to our own souls; never yielding to them, for that would be to surrender to the devil: this is the discipline of the Christian man's will.

Of course it will be inevitable, if we are to be disciplined by temptation, that we shall sometimes fall. How often, must depend on the energy with which we fight. But to none is it given never to fall. Yet, if we fall, the need of these temptations must teach us not to seek silly excuses, by pleading to our own conscience that we were tempted so sorely. It may be all quite true, and, as far as it is true, it does palliate the fall to this extent, that he who falls under severe temptation is not so guilty as he who falls with little temptation or none. But what is the use of seeking palliations? Seek as we may, the fact remains, that here was the means provided by the Providence of God for disciplining our souls; and, instead of using it as

we ought, we have made it an occasion of doing ourselves harm. What is the use of thinking what we might have done if we had not been tempted? The temptation came to us to do us good, and if God watches over the very sparrows, assuredly He did not allow this temptation to come to us except at the right time, and when it was just needed. We look back afterwards and say that it came at the wrong moment; it took us unawares; or it was too much in itself; or it was when we were particularly weak. But that is easy to say afterwards: we say it because we fall. Not so. God, who governs the world, takes care of all that. And when, instead of looking to our part of the business, we take to judging His, we are silly and worse than silly. It is silly for a man to talk to his own heart in a tone which implies that he could have contrived a better arrangement of the circumstances of his own life; and that if he were left to arrange his own trials and his own temptations he could give himself a proper discipline without the same dangers. We must take the circumstances of our lives as we find them, and make the best use of them. And if we have failed to make the best use of them, we must still learn not to lay the fault on them; for whatever they were, we might as well have done the best that could be done. Even after you have fallen you may still make a better use of the temptation than trying to lay the fault upon it. You may seek out how far you can avoid it, and take care to do so. You

may seek to prevent it ever assailing you unawares hereafter. You may humble yourself before God who allowed it to come. And this is far better than complaining of it. What would be said of a soldier who, being defeated, complained of having been sent into danger? Why, if there were no danger where would be the soldier's honour or reward? where would be his means of proving his devotion to his duty? why should he even exist? And so too, without temptation, where would be the Christian's crown? or why should men be Christians at all? Resist, brethren, earnestly resist the inclination which always comes over you when you have done wrong, to lessen the fault all to nothing by dwelling on the severity of the temptation. If you have been tried severely, then remember that the greater the danger the greater the honour to him that was sent into it. A general does not send a soldier whom he cannot trust into a service of difficulty. Neither does Christ employ servants whom He does not love on difficult acts of obedience. If you have sinned, do not exaggerate the sin or try to make it out to your own conscience worse than it is. But try to look at it as it is. Try to think how your father or your mother would judge it. And do not throw away even the good that you may yet obtain from it by dwelling on the soreness of the trial.

On the other hand, it is very important to notice that it is not every apparent victory over temptation that is a real victory. There is a seeming victory which is a

real defeat, and I fear a very dangerous defeat, and it is for this reason that we sometimes find that those very temptations, which we are disposed to reckon as our occasions of victory, have after all done us harm instead of good. There are two ways of resisting and overcoming temptation. You may turn away from the tempter with a cheerful resolute will, heartily throwing yourself into your duty, endeavouring to find there, not your duty only, but your happiness also, turning out of your head cheerfully but resolutely even the thought which hankers after what is wrong. Or you may resist the temptation, and even overcome it, with anger at your heart, and an eager longing for the forbidden pleasure still ruling your soul; with eyes looking back to what you are quitting, with discontent at the hard duty which has divided you from your wish, with secret complaining and bitterness at the hardness of your trials. Now this last way of overcoming temptation is not that which St. James declares to be blessed. The type of the character is Balaam, the wicked prophet. He obeyed; exactly obeyed what he was plainly commanded. But it is clear as day that his obedience was merely outward. He did not surrender himself heart and soul to the command. He was hankering after the rewards that Balak offered; and he could not bear to give them up. And so although he would never curse God's people, since he was told that he must not, he did the very wickedest thing recorded in the Old Testament; he

deliberately told the Moabites how they could seduce God's people into sin. Was he much benefited by having overcome the temptation of Balak's offers? Or was he not rather hardened in a subtler but wickeder sinfulness?

Yet this kind of victory is by no means uncommon. You are, for instance, plainly called to do some act of unselfishness. Your conscience points out to you that here is an occasion for self-sacrifice; perhaps not only points out that here is an occasion, but that here is a distinct call, which you cannot rightly turn away from. You are too conscientious not to listen to the call. You sacrifice your own wish to the wish, the pleasure, the feelings of others. But in what spirit? How very natural is it to indemnify one's self, as it were, by cherishing an angry discontent at having been called on to make such a sacrifice; perhaps to despise the one who has benefited by it, even though he is not in the least degree conscious of the benefit; perhaps to long for some happy turn of accident that shall make the sacrifice unnecessary, and give one the double satisfaction both of enjoying one's wishes and of having sacrificed them; perhaps to brood over it often afterwards, and complain of one's lot, or even of life altogether, so full as it is of hardships like these. How can we expect that unselfishness like this will strengthen the character, will bring us nearer to God, will make us feel that we are in the arms of Christ, will give us an idea of the beauty of holiness, will make us

more ready for the next occasion when Christ shall call us to take up the Cross.

I have spoken of acts of self-sacrifice as giving instances of this false victory over temptation, because I believe that unselfishness is peculiarly the duty the fulfilment of which is exposed to this danger. Of all victories, the victories over selfishness are those which most often leave behind them a discontent which utterly spoils them, and makes them positively mischievous to the soul. It is in these cases that we most often see that strangest of all results, a man who has passed through much suffering for 'conscience' sake, and yet is not the better for his suffering. What can be sadder—a soul that has given up much for God's service, given up, it may be, its own chief happiness as it seemed at the time, persisted in this self-sacrifice for years, and yet after all is not sweeter but sourer, is not more loving but more discontented, is not more peaceful but more querulous? But the same issue is also possible in fighting with other temptations. Temptations to vanity, frivolity, idleness; to indulgence of bodily appetite; to pride; to love of power; to wrong ambition, may be resisted, and may be overcome; and yet he that overcometh may not be blessed, because he has not overcome the inward enemy but only the outward. The evil spirit may have been driven out, and yet may have left behind him a spirit of discontent to keep his place; and that spirit, if left unmolested, shall do as much harm as the spirit that has been expelled.

To overcome temptation, not in outer act merely, but with heart and soul, that is what wins the crown of life; the crown emphatically of life, for he who has passed through temptations victorious, he it is who emphatically lives. He has in him the richness of his own experience. He is not using words without meaning, or words with a vague, hazy, indistinct idea, when he speaks of the battle of the Christian, or of the help of his Redeemer. The house which he is building rests not on the sand of mere emotion, but on the rock of Christ's presence in his soul, which temptations have laid bare for him to build on. His principles are not mere sentiments, but living powers, whose strength has been tried and proved. His doctrines are not mere forms of speech; they correspond with needs of his soul, which he has probed to the bottom in the hour of difficulty. The Bible is not to him a beautiful and awful book, full of wonderful promises, which sound like words in a foreign tongue full of awful threatenings, which seem too fearful to be literally true; but a record of realities into which he has himself entered, a world of spirits where he can find his own place, see his own work, obtain his own helps. God is not to him the ruler of the Universe in which he himself is a little unconsidered fragment, which it is strange to think of as noticed in the mass; but his own Father, Who has told him, and still tells him, what he is to do, and Who will not and cannot forget him even if Himself be all forgotten.

Christ is not to him the Redeemer of mankind, Who died for the sins of the whole world, and is still bringing sinners to repentance; but the Friend Whose love surpasses all other love, Whose sympathy embraces all other sympathy, Whose help cannot fail, Whose indwelling Spirit is ever bringing into his heart, up from the eternal fountains, the waters of eternal life. This is the crown which buds here and blossoms hereafter, and fills all the soul on which it falls with the power of its beauty; and this crown is given to him who, when temptations come, gives himself mind and soul, and will and heart, to fulfil the love of Christ.

SERMON XXIII.

ALL LIGHT GOOD.

Preached on Whit Sunday, 1859.

ST. JOHN xiii. 17.

'*If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them.*'

IT is very sad to fail in duty from ignorance. And when that ignorance is very gross, the failure is generally so complete and so visible, that it is sure to meet with its appropriate punishment. The utter worthlessness into which men can sink who have never been taught any portion of the truth, is a visible proof to us how much we owe to the light which has been shed over our own lives. The extinction not only of the feelings which we commonly call human, but even of those which we share with brute animals; the want of natural affection; the want of natural decency; the violence, the grossness, the obstinate hardness of heart, the recklessness even of immediate consequences, which sometimes astonish us in the characters of unhapppy fellow-creatures, left entirely

to themselves to work out their own evil nature without a suggestion of help or of warning, without a hint of the coming judgment, of the life beyond the grave, of the power, the holiness, the mercy of God; these sights, which are never far to seek, tell plainly that light of any kind is a gift of God, and has a power beyond the power of miracles. It is awful to be quite dark; to have no thought beyond the present world and the needs of earth; to have never heard of God; to know absolutely nothing of the Lord Jesus Christ; to know nothing, or worse than nothing, of the laws of righteousness; to be without all conscience—without all higher impulses—without all appreciation of what is noble or pure; to be filled heart and soul with a wretched cunning, or, perhaps, to be cowed by a still more wretched superstition; to have no more feeling than just what a brute beast may have for its young, and, perhaps, not even so much as that. Such unhappy victims of the neglect either of parents or society at large, stand where they do, visible marks to prove to our eyes what we owe to light and knowledge, and how much of God's goodness is wrapped up even in that worldly refinement which educated heathens had before Christ came, which many attain to now who never come to Christ. These unhappy creatures assuredly get terribly punished for their share of the fault which degrades them, and how far they are to be excused for their ignorance we shall never know till the Judgment Day reveals all secrets.

Their condition clearly tells us what education does for us: what we gain from mere unassisted light. Mere light of intellect, without any direct consciousness of God or of Heaven, or of Christ, or of conscience, does a great and visible work. It sets a man free from many temptations, so that without making him, as far as we can see, at all a better man, it puts him in a better position. There are many gross sins which lose all their power over him, simply because other attractions are presented which are still more powerful. There are many which not only lose power, but become positively disgusting, because, while they appeal to his lower nature, they repel his higher. Some sins are killed by the refinement of education: some by its unconscious discipline: some by a sort of growth in the understanding: some by their being connected with disagreeable associations. There cannot be the slightest doubt that light poured in upon the understanding not only gives greater strength to resist temptations, but removes a great many altogether. The possible pleasures within reach of a thoroughly uneducated man are so few, that sinful pleasures must form a large proportion of them. His range of thought is so narrow that self must occupy a large space. He is tempted to gratify appetite, simply because he has no other indulgence within reach. He is tempted to let the body rule him because the soul has so little to employ him about. Those who have learnt better, if they have nothing else, yet have their time and their

thoughts more filled, and not so much room left for evil.

But this is not all, though this is much. Light of any kind invariably throws light upon duty, and if we know anything, we are sure to have thereby a clearer knowledge of right from wrong. The mere awakening of the understanding must awaken the conscience in some degree. You cannot gain more intellectual power without also gaining moral light. Just as the coming of the daylight shews you the beauty of nature at the same moment that it shews you the position of surrounding objects, so, too, even the merest science must reveal in some slight degree the beauty of the Will of God.

I know not how those shall be judged who have never had any such aid, and have therefore sunk into the condition of brute beasts. God, who seeth not as man seeth, will one day do absolute justice to all, and their unhappy lot shall meet at once with His unbounded mercy and His unerring judgment. But their condition proves to us, that the education which we obtain from intercourse with one another is the appointed machinery chosen by His Providence for fashioning our hearts according to His will. Even those who have never yet been touched at heart by the power of His Word written or spoken, even souls that have not yet opened to receive His revealed truth, even those who have never heard of Christ, or from whose cold and hard hearts that name has glided off without a trace, even they have received a precious gift,

if their understandings have been awakened by the light of the knowledge of this present world. And for that gift they will certainly be responsible.

And how much more shall we.

It is well on such a day as this to force ourselves to consider what a thing is that every-day, that commonplace gift which we call Conscience; and what a thing it is to have had that stirred into life, and inspired with heavenly thoughts, and armed with heavenly weapons, and instructed to convey to us a heavenly message. It is every-day and commonplace. In other words, it is like the air we breathe, like the food that we eat. Shall we then never know its value, except, perchance, by losing it? Or is it not enough to compare ourselves with those to whom it has never been taught to speak? with those who, losing the Light, have lost so much besides? with those of whom, if we have human feelings, we cannot think but with the profoundest pity and pain?

We are taught better. Do we think how much better? Do we realise how much, in a place like this, we receive, all of us, Masters and Boys, which we can never repay? Do we endeavour, in any measure, to make our service keep pace with the blessings that are given us, or have we at all improved ourselves in proportion to what Providence has done for us? I cannot help often contrasting this place with what schools were when I was at school myself. I cannot help seeing, day by day, how many blessings both you and I have here which then were not

to be obtained. The mere fact that every Sunday we meet in this Chapel and consecrate the week and the week's work to God, the mere fact that every Sunday this whole School unites in the service as the centre of its common life; this alone makes such a difference as ought to have its effect on every soul amongst us. It is ever the temptation of Masters to forget the other world in the constant demands of a most engrossing profession, and to forget wisdom in teaching knowledge. It is ever the temptation of Boys to forget the future in the present, and to let the pleasure or the business of the day drive out all other thoughts. What is it to be reminded every week, almost whether we will or no, of a higher aim, of a truer glory, of a nobler business! It is quite impossible that all this should not penetrate into our consciences. We must learn, we cannot avoid learning, something of the truth of God, and the love of Christ. It is as certain as our bodily growth, that thoughts will be suggested which will point to God and to Heaven, that words will stick in our memory which will often check a sin or help a prayer, that whatever may be our after lives, we shall never again be able quite to quench the unquenchable light that is slowly but surely kindling in our hearts.

But here, above all other places of the kind, what an involuntary education there is in the very sound of the name, in the associations of its history. On this Sunday morning seventeen years ago Arnold died. He died, as

surely it was best that such a man should die, in the very midst of his labours, in the very fulness of his energy. He was cut short, and his work suddenly cut short with him. But that work, as we well know, died only as the seed dies which the husbandman scatters on his fields. His work died only to spring up in a miraculous harvest; and it may be truly said that, from the moment of his death, his power over England began. His thoughts, his words, his nobleness of life, above all his spirit, has never ceased to work; and you can find the traces of his teaching now, where, while he lived, his name would have been a word of offence and anger. The power of his presence has grown in visible stature within the memory of those who knew him. And there is no place in England where a Christian can hear his name without a heartfelt recognition that he was a true and faithful servant of God.

And here surely, if anywhere, his former presence must still be working, and we cannot, with all our shortcomings, have yet lost all touch of his true-hearted manliness. Nay, it is impossible for one who came here as I did, a stranger to the place, not to recognise on every hand the visible marks of what he did. I am reminded of him, and of his sayings, and his loftiness of purpose, almost every week. I can see at times the reflection of his thoughts in minds that surely do not know from whom they have been learning. I can catch the echo of his words in many forms around me. Even much that I well know is far

older than his time, yet bears his impress unmistakeably, and will bear it long.

And with all this stirring our souls, sometimes consciously, sometimes unconsciously, shall we not acknowledge our responsibility to the God who gave it? Shall we think little of the abundant light shed over our eyes, and refuse to fill our life with that which already fills our intellects and consciences? Let me charge you on this day, the day of Arnold's death, to think what it is that is most striking in his example, and in the spirit of his life. I will not try to describe his character, nor give you and myself the pain of feeling how much is needed entirely to appreciate him; but I will only ask you to think if at any moment of his life, from the time that we know anything of it, to the day when he was suddenly called away, if at any moment of life one who knew him could have had a moment's doubt on which side he was fighting? Was there ever a moment when it could be said that he wavered or paltered with his conscience, or allowed another hope, another aim, to guide his life, and not the service of his Master? He doubtless had his faults, and God, the just Judge, will make him see them, and will cleanse them all away. But could any one, by any sort of misjudgment, fancy him not in earnest, or believe that he had private ends to serve? Did he ever trifle with himself, or hesitate for a second between clear right and wrong?

The legacy of his spirit he has bequeathed to us, and

we are called upon not to neglect so precious a gift. It is just one of those gifts which I would rather remember on Whit Sunday than on any other day, because it is just by such gifts that God awakens in the souls of His children the power of the Holy Ghost. The memory of such a man, of all his truth and nobleness and courage, of all his untiring self-devotion, of his absolute unselfishness, of his lofty spirit, is given to us to awaken our slumbering consciences, and to enable them to give us the message of God.

And this message, then, let this day ring in our ears, and let us never forget it. Trifle not with the conscience. Trifle not with the one voice which always speaks with the authority of Heaven, the one guide which is commissioned to bring you to Christ. Trifle not with the representative of the Holy Ghost, speaking in His Holy Name. You will certainly often fall into sin, and live as you will, you will never be allowed to forget, till you reach your death-bed, the meaning of repentance. Sins of sudden impulse, sins of temptation not foreseen, sins of temptation proving far stronger than we had expected, sins of temptation almost irresistible in their violence; to such as these you must be liable. But never pass by or palter with the clear voice of conscience, with the plain command of duty; never let it be doubtful to your own soul whether you belong to the right side or wrong, whether you are a true soldier or a false traitor. Never deliberate about what is clearly wrong, and try to persuade

yourself that it is not. Never trifle with the verdict of your own soul, and make excuses for your sin to yourself, or try to palliate and forget what you ought to forsake with hearty contrition. For remember that the voice within is the very voice of God; and if you play false with that, you are a traitor to your Master.

SERMON XXIV.

THE GROWTH OF THE CONSCIENCE

HEBREWS V. 14.

'*But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who, by reason of use, have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.*'

THIS verse, like another well-known verse in the same Epistle, seems to contain in few words the solution of a difficulty which accompanies us throughout the writings of St. Paul. For all through St. Paul's teaching a prominent doctrine is what we now call liberty of conscience. The inner principle is always recognised by him as supreme over the man: so much so that even he, though an inspired Apostle, in writing to the Corinthians, refuses to claim dominion over their faith, but declares that it is his business to be a helper in their joy; and again, in writing to the Philippians, distinctly acknowledges that it is possible that they may not see the truth of what he is telling, but that he has no doubt, that if in anything they be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto them.

Now, it is not difficult to see why the Apostle thus puts the inner voice above all outer voices whatever. For the inner voice, and that voice alone, speaks personally and individually to the soul. Any other revelation can give only general rules. The Bible supplies us with principles, with precepts, with examples, but we know well that in the actual conduct of life the application of all these to the details of our daily deeds, and thoughts, and words, is quite as important as the principles themselves. A man's conscience may be mistaken; but still, after all, it is the only light that he has got which will enlighten him in each separate case where he has a choice of conduct. A man's conscience may be mistaken; but if so, obedience to it is a mistake and not a sin, and we know that mistakes are very different from sins. If our conscience be mistaken because we have not taken due trouble to enlighten it, then for that neglect of cultivating our conscience we are responsible. But even then the conscience claims our obedience, and if to obey is a mistake, to disobey is a sin. All other authorities speak to men in general; this voice speaks to the very soul that hears it and to none other. All other authorities speak of the general rules by which we must live; this voice speaks of what is to be done now, here, in these circumstances. Now, no one can help feeling that a command given to him personally to do, or not to do, a given act at the moment, must have more weight than a general command given to all men, or given for all times. It is as if

God Himself had interfered for our guidance, and had thereby superseded all other guidance. And though the messenger who thus comes direct from God may after all be mistaken, yet surely we can do nothing but obey him, and pray to God to guard him against mistakes.

This is the claim of the conscience, and of this claim St. Paul never loses sight. Indeed he sometimes states the claim in language which he himself is obliged to guard. 'All things are lawful for me,' he says in more than one place, and he says it in such a way as to imply that he had said it often before. And he means plainly enough, 'I may do anything which my conscience does not condemn.' But he adds in one place, 'All things are not expedient;' and again, 'I will not be brought under the power of any;' and again, 'All things edify not.' He never gives up his principle; but he modifies its application by many warnings; some, such as I have quoted; some still more strong, denouncing sins and bidding his hearers not be deceived into fancying that such sins are permissible; some implied in the course of his argument rather than distinctly stated. For the principle cannot be surrendered. Mistaken or not, the conscience must rule the life. To do right in disobedience to conscience would be (if it could ever be done) more fatal to the character by far than to do wrong in obedience to it. But nevertheless, the Apostle feels, and every one must feel in reading what he says, that surely here is a serious difficulty.

The difference between making conscience supreme, and making any outer law or authority supreme, depends in fact on this. Which is it that God would have here on earth, good actions or good men? Does His Gospel propose to redeem and sanctify men's deeds or their souls? Does He desire to see a series of good acts, acts, that is, regulated in their outward form by His holy Law? or does He desire to see a number of His servants striving to obey His will? If you want a number of right acts, then your business is to lay down a number of fixed rules and get men to obey them. But if you desire to have a number of good men, then it is tolerably plain that you must awake within them a power that shall guide their lives independently of mere rules. The acts of such men may not be quite as good as those of the men who are compelled to walk in a more defined path. But the men are men, and not machines, and as such are truer servants of God. To procure such men, the voice within themselves must be entrusted with the absolute dominion over all their lives.

The difficulty is, how far this principle is to apply. Are all consciences in a state to claim this liberty? Is it to be given to bad men as well as good? Is it to be given to children of six years old? Are all men equally fitted to decide on all practical questions? And this difficulty was even greater in some respects in those days than in these. Those new converted heathens, with their very low notions of the duty of purity, were they to be told at once,

All things are lawful for you? Granted that the law was not made for a righteous man, is it not made for any one? What will justify a man in relying unreservedly on his conscience?

The answer is supplied by the verse in the Epistle to to the Hebrews with which I began. Those who, by reason of use, have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil, are fitted to use strong meat. They may trust themselves to decide on their own conduct, to choose their own opinions; not certainly in confidence that they cannot make mistakes, but that their mistakes will not be ruinous to their character, and will, on the contrary, contain ever more good than evil. The conscience, like the other faculties that God gives, is not implanted perfect all at once. It has its infancy, its age of weakness; and it ought to have and can have its age of maturity. When it is full grown, it may and it must be trusted unreservedly. We may seek to enlarge it, to enlighten it, to inspire it, still; but we may and we must obey it. We may still need caution to guard us against confounding other voices with its commands. We may still need to consult wiser friends; we shall surely always need to feed it with the nourishment given in the Bible, namely, the doctrines, the precepts, the examples there held up before us. But we cannot dethrone it from its rightful place of judge and guide of all our conduct.

This is its claim when it has grown to its full strength. And how, then, does it grow? Will it grow entirely of

itself, or does it depend entirely on our own exertions?

Its growth is like the growth of all our other faculties, the result of a combination of what is without with what is within. It will grow partly, on the one hand, by the experience of our lives, by the intercourse of our fellows, by the truth that we learn in our studies, by the new thoughts that flash upon us unbidden we know not whence, by the mere lapse of time and growth of our whole framework, both of body and soul, but, above all and through all, by the constant use of God's Holy Word, without which it would hardly be the same faculty: partly, on the other hand, by our own greater or less co-operation, by the bent which we have given to our wills, by the purposes which we have cherished as the hope of our future days, by the passions and impulses that we have fostered in our secret hearts. On the one hand, every day will probably enable us to see more distinctly the consequences and the bearings of every separate act, the extent and limits of every rule of life, the true meaning of every precept in the Bible, the application of our Lord's commands, the various doctrines of the Gospel of God. And this, to a great extent, without any co-operation on our part at all; simply because we are older and more experienced, and our intellects have attained to greater power. But, on the other hand, the power of the Gospel, the true nature of sin, the hatefulness of evil in God's sight, the love of Christ which passeth knowledge,—these, and truths

like these, are quite invisible, except to the soul, which opens to receive the grace that flows into it from on high, and rises to meet the blessings that God is ever giving.

The conscience is in fact a double faculty. It requires for its perfection not only light, but power. You will sometimes meet with men who, partly from much knowledge of the world and of their fellow-creatures, and partly from a peculiar clearness of intellect, have a singular insight into right and wrong, and can often give a judgment on points of conduct which convinces the reason the moment it is uttered. And yet these very men shew by their words, and still more by their lives, that they have never really grasped the true nature of God's law. They seem to deduce what is right from general principles, just as a mathematician deduces his result from the data, without caring about it when they have got it. They deal with questions of right and wrong as if playing with counters. They come surely, but mechanically, to a right conclusion. They will see at once what is the generous thing to do; but they indulge in a secret smile at the folly of generosity. They condemn at once anything impure, as contrary to God's law; but they think lightly of it all the time, and treat it as a comparative trifle. They see what is right and what is wrong; but of the fearful gulf which separates these two things, of the eternal war whereby each endeavours to overpower the other, of the fact that these two things, and

these alone, are the substance of the world, and reach into the everlasting kingdom and to the very throne of God, of this they have not the slightest conception.

And hence, indeed, even their insight into points of conduct cannot always be trusted. In all those less usual cases where feelings and motives come into play, when you cannot absolutely decide the right or wrong, but must make it depend on the temper and spirit of the doer; in all those cases where consequences seem to point very strongly one way, though principles point the other; in cases where an apparently small evil will bring about an apparently great good; in all such cases these clear-sighted but worldly-hearted men are almost sure to be in fault. For, after all, they have the form of godliness, but not the power thereof.

The real growth of the conscience requires more than this. It requires all this indeed, for without this it would be narrow. It requires all the light that the intellect can get; all the light that can be supplied by experience, by study, by thought, by personal growth. For if it cannot get this, it is narrower than it ought to be, and is apt to condemn what ought not to be condemned, and so to shut its owner out from sympathies which would be useful to him. But all this is not, after all, anything in comparison with that inward opening of the soul to the Holy Spirit which ever binds the heart to Him, and makes the conscience the reflection of His will. The religious man

may not see so clearly as the worldly man, and in any given case the religious man may be wrong, and the worldly man right, in deciding what ought to be done. And yet how infinite the gulf which separates the two, and how far does the wrong decision of the one stand above the right decision of the other. For the religious man carries into his decision the spirit of his heart; he sanctifies and purifies what he does by doing it to God; he exorcises the evil of it by the name of Christ, whom he serves. And so high does the spirit ever stand above the letter, that most assuredly the mischief of his mistake will never do half the harm that is done by the emptiness of the other man's heart. And in far the majority of cases there will be no such mistake at all; but the religious man's want of clear intellect will not prevent him from finding the right, where the clear-sighted man of the world has been misled for want of depth of feeling.

The true condition of the growth of the conscience is to live in it. To obey it is not enough, if, by obedience, is meant simply doing what it bids. What is wanted is to live in its spirit. That voice is ever calling us to Him who gave it; to God the Father who created it; to Christ whose Gospel redeemed it, purifies it, fills it with power; to the Holy Spirit speaking in the Word of God, and revealing the everlasting truth. The constant habit of referring our lives to the will of Christ, the habit of living in the thought of His presence, of trusting entirely to His love, of feeling an absolute confidence in His protection and

care, of doing His will, as far as we know it, cheerfully and resolutely, of opening our hearts for Him to see, of filling our intellects with the lessons which He has written for our learning,—this is the life which exercises the senses to discern both good and evil. Without this, we shall certainly increase daily in the knowledge of our duty, but not in that knowledge which specially marks the servant of God. We shall see what is right, and care little for it when we have seen it; we shall know what is wrong, and yet find no shock of horror come over us if we do it; we shall have large minds and narrow hearts; and then we shall find that it is even a loss to us that we are nominally Christians, because the Christian system is constructed for those who have strength to be free, and it would have been better for us to be still under the Law.

SERMON XXV

THE SECRETS OF THE SOUL.

ROMANS ii. 16.

'The day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ according to my gospel.'

THE thought of the coming of Christ to judgment almost inevitably leads the mind to the two great revelations which will then be made, the revelation of the secrets of the hearts of men, and the revelation of the true substance and nature of things. We shall see and we shall be seen. At present all things are under a veil; no man knows his neighbour's real character except by inference; no man knows the truth of the universe except by faith. But then both these will be known by sight. At present there is a perpetual contradiction between faith and experience; justice does not rule the world, and obedience to the Law of God, which ought to be, as it seems to us, the one supreme force in the world, is thrust aside by what is plausible, by what is resolute, by mere accident even and blind chance. But on that day the higher

harmony which rules all these discords shall be revealed; the wrong shall either be set right before our eyes, or shall be shewn never to have been wrong, but only to have been misunderstood. So, again, at present we live, each man in his own den, with good and with evil, which none knows except the man himself, and even he but imperfectly and fitfully. But then we shall be seen and known of all men; for the judgment will be a public judgment, and all will acknowledge its justice.

Let us look at one of these strange facts to-day, the secrecy in which we all live, and the certainty that that secrecy will not last for ever.

We live, I say, in a strange secrecy, even hidden from our most loving and most intimate friends. If any one of us were asked to relate his own life, he might relate two lives which would seem all but independent of each other. He might tell when he was born, where he had lived, where he had passed year after year, what persons he had lived with, what persons he had met, what he had done in the way of study or of amusement, what had happened to him that was remarkable, what events had made a great difference in his life. He might anticipate the future, and calculate what profession he was likely to be employed in; what were his chances of success in it; what openings seemed to lie before him in his path; what old age he looked forward to, and how he expected to end his days. Or, again, he might tell quite a different story. What he remembered of his own early

character; what were his real affections; what did he secretly like, and pursue, and hope for; what changes had passed over him; what events had influenced the general current of his hopes, of his day-dreams, of his thoughts; what persons had left a deep impression on him; what books had strengthened his will, his conscience, his nobler impulses; what companions, what reading, what accidents had strengthened the evil or the lower parts of his nature, and had given him trouble in his spiritual combat. He might tell to what thoughts his mind naturally turned in the moment of leisure; what unfinished pictures were, as it were, hung up all round the inner chamber of his soul. He might tell what struggles he had been engaged in, and what had been their issue: some still going on, not yet fought out; some in which the victory of conscience had been complete enough to fear no further opposition, although there still remained the wounds and weakness of the once fierce battle; some too, perhaps, in which, if not evil, yet at any rate the lower nature had triumphed, and the fight had ceased because the standard of holiness once aimed at had been declared too high, and a lower standard had been, either in painful humility or in cowardly and contemptible weakness, accepted for the rest of life. He might tell of the very beginnings, unknown to all save himself, of habits of sin never since quite shaken off. He might tell of deeds done in darkness, which, though actual deeds and not mere thoughts,

yet are part of this secret inner life by virtue of their absolute concealment. He might tell why some names, some associations, some memories make him uncomfortable without any visible reason; why he wishes, in his secret heart, some subjects to be forbidden subjects, and is always conscious of an effort to seem indifferent when they are mentioned.

Now how different these two lives would often be! How events of the highest importance in the one would be of no importance at all in the other! How persons who play a large part in the one would disappear in the other altogether, or almost altogether! How strange it would be to see that a man who had succeeded in the eyes of his friends and acquaintance in a particular path had meanwhile been cherishing within him quite foreign thoughts and other longings! How strange to find that a fair character was only fair because the best side of it was worn outwards! How strange to see the completely new judgments that would be required, and how entirely at fault would often be the ordinary estimate! Those who had always been highly praised would, in many cases, not win more at the very best than deep pity; and some few who now suffer from shewing ill to men's eyes would be found to rank far above the level at which they had always been placed. Most certainly it would not unfrequently be the case that the recital of a man's inner or secret life would completely change our opinion of him. But still more often, nay,

perhaps always, we should be astonished to see, even when no change was made in our judgment of the man, how entirely these two lives were separated from one another, and how they seemed to run side by side almost without mingling.

The revelation will one day be made, and Christ will decide, and He alone can decide, on the evidence which each will give. Neither tells the whole man. The outer life only tells, what we are under all the influences of the eyes of others; those eyes call into force a completely different set of faculties and a different set of motives: the desire to be thought well of, the desire to please, the desire to win praise, or popularity, or love, then begin to act; the sense of dignity and self-respect, the sense of being members of a larger body, become more powerful. Our consciences, too, are strengthened in some ways by the sight of each other; and there are some duties which we see much more clearly when our outer life is affected by them. On the other hand, the inner life tells what we are when quite left to ourselves. At first sight it might seem as if this might stand for the whole man. But it is not so. No man is complete while alone. There is a large part of his nature which is made to fit into the society of his fellows; and if this part of him does not find its proper complement, the nature of the man is not all called out, and only half of him, as it were, is in real action. Moreover, what goes on in our secret lives is, to a great extent, the very consequence of our believing

that it will end where it begins. Many a man indulges passing thoughts just because they are thoughts, and the same man would not put these thoughts into actual deeds even if tempted by the certainty of perpetual concealment. Such a man is wrong, very wrong; but it would still be a mistake to judge him as if these secret thoughts represented evil deeds, which he only refrains from doing because he fears detection. It would not be possible therefore to judge a man either by the secret life or by the public. But Christ will unveil them both, and we shall see and feel the justice of His decision.

Now we can easily see why God who made us has thus shut up a large and important part of our lives in this absolute secrecy. God has made us to be members one of another, and our religious and moral life is bound up in each other; but He will not have us to be nothing but members one of another. Every soul shall have an individual life, with an individual history, and shall come at last to an individual judgment. Our whole character is not intended, and will not be allowed, to be absorbed in that of a larger body. God requires that each Christian soul shall have a separate and independent strength supplied by Himself, and by Himself alone. The Church is much. The Church is a channel of grace. The Church shall inspire, shall support, shall instruct, shall restore. But the Church shall not be everything. You shall, if you are to call yourself a servant of Christ, devote to His service something more than what you

give in common with all around you. You shall give something which you and you alone can give, which you and you alone can know whether you give or not. From this responsibility you cannot escape. Another may ask you whether you have done it, whether you are doing it or not. But he must depend for his answer on what you tell him, and he cannot know, and never can know, whether your answer is the whole truth. God and God alone can tell that; and between yourself and God the secret must remain till the judgment-day. Much may ooze out; and much that you would rather conceal will probably be discovered; and shrewd guesses will penetrate even that part of your secret which you would most wish to keep. But still the bulk of that secret life shall remain untouched. To God your whole soul lies open. To man very little of it can be shewn.

But this secret will not be kept longer than enough to serve its purpose. And woe betide the soul that uses it ill. This sacred veil cast by the Creator in front of a man's Holy of Holies can be used; nay, we must confess it, such is our fallen state, that it is used to hide evil of every kind. And how utterly this is contrary to the intention with which it is given, is proved by the terrible mischief which such a use of it causes, and the terrible punishment which such a use of it often brings. The sin, which if confessed, would be repented of, and after a time might safely be forgotten, rankles and festers in the concealment of the guilty soul worse than any hidden

disease in the body. Nothing gangrenes the soul like concealment. The falsehood; the sense of duplicity; the snares; and, as it were, the net-work of new concealments perpetually demanded; the painful recollection; the stoppage of honest sympathies; this, and much more than this, haunts the spirit of the unhappy man who has not courage to tell upon himself. Everything goes wrong where there is this burden weighing on the spiritual walk. There is no steady cheerfulness, but only a fitful imitation of it; there is no brightness; there is no fearlessness. And the pain is almost as great as the mischief. What pain, in the whole experience of life, is like the fear of detection? No punishment that can fall upon a sin is equal to this which a man inflicts on himself. And then add to this the length of time through which it lasts. How, among all the faults of the past, these stand out in the memory, the faults which we concealed! How many years they continue to dog us! How they make us blush, or feel uncomfortable, at slight associations which recall them! And, perhaps, the time comes when it is no longer right to confess them; when conscience interferes and bids us bear this burden henceforward. This may be rare; but it is so sometimes; and the burden does not cease to be a burden because this is so. All this comes not of the sin by itself, but of its secret character. The very same sin which would be but little if known, becomes very serious, simply because it is secret.

God has hidden a part of our lives; and this concealment we can cast over much more than He has hidden. But again and again are we warned against it. It is the man whose deeds are evil that loves darkness rather than light. It is every one that doeth evil that hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved. It is the special characteristic of Christians that they are not of the night nor of darkness. It is with the unfruitful works of darkness with which we are to have no fellowship. It is the works of darkness that we are to cut off now that our day is at hand. And what is the voice of God's word, that is also the voice of natural feeling. The man who is fair outside and foul within, is condemned of all men as a hypocrite. Men reserve all their strongest terms of reprobation for the dark, reserved, and secret sinner. Men hunt down, as if impelled by an appointed instinct, with tenfold eagerness the secret criminal. Men refuse their love to the reserved and secret character; and that, too, even while they respect with a religious carefulness the secret which a man has a plain right to conceal. Nature and Revelation both warn us against the danger we run if we pollute our inner and secret life with what we dare not tell.

In view of this awful coming judgment let us determine to force all our faults outwards. At whatever cost let us keep sacred to God that inner shrine which He has thus hidden with a secrecy of His own making. Let us avoid

a secret sin with thrice, with a hundred times more eager avoidance, just because it is secret. Let us jealously guard against that doubleness of face which begins in a slight concealment, but will ever grow till it makes us into two utterly different men, a fair character for our fellows, and a foul character for the eyes of God and Christ. If we can be fair anywhere let it be in that which God has reserved for Himself, and where Christ is willing to dwell.

SERMON XXVI.

PRESSING FORWARDS.

PHILIPPIANS iii. 13, 14.

'Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth to those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.'

THESE words would be interesting under any circumstances, since they are the words of St. Paul speaking of himself. But they become doubly interesting when we remember the time at which they were written. For the Epistle to the Philippians, in which these words occur, belongs to the time of his imprisonment at Rome. He was no novice giving vent to the enthusiasm of a recent conversion. He had been a Christian for something like thirty years. He had been an Apostle not far short of twenty. He had founded church after church in the wisest and most intelligent cities of the world. He had again and again traversed Greece and Asia Minor. He had borne every kind of persecution, and shrunk from no kind of labour. Fasting, and weariness,

and perils had been long familiar. He had long given up all pleasure, all honour, all ambition, to the one hope of serving the Master who had shone upon his eyes on the way to Damascus. He had given up what, to his sensitive nature, must have been the hardest of all to give up, the tried affection of many a tried friend and the deep delight of recognised patriotism. He had chosen a path in God's service which made his countrymen call him a traitor, which turned the feelings of all his early friends and admirers either into contempt or into bitter and fanatical hatred. And the result of all this miracle of self-sacrifice was now being written down on the world's surface in a glorious list of Christian Churches, of which he was at once the founder and the chief. Surely if any man had any right to think he had done enough, it was such a man as this. Surely if old age gives the privilege of repose on the way to Heaven, the aged Apostle, such an one as Paul the aged, might claim the blessing of rest. Not so thought St. Paul. Forgetting all this, forgetting his labours and his sufferings, all that he had given up, all that he had done, now in old age, he was still pressing forward, pressing forward to the mark for the prize which he did not consider that he had yet attained.

Now the example of St. Paul here set before us by himself contains a warning and an encouragement, and of both these I would wish to speak.

It contains a warning against a sin into which we are

all prone to slip almost unawares: the sin of standing still. For I would have you consider whether it is at all likely that if St. Paul in old age, after all he had learnt, and done, and suffered, still found it necessary to be pressing forward, still found it necessary, as he says only a few years earlier, to keep under his body and bring it into subjection, lest he might be a castaway, whether it is likely that we should ever attain to a state in which we might rightly cease from our warfare against sin. And yet we do very often give up the battle long before we have won it, and make a sort of truce with evil, and endeavour to content ourselves and to content our consciences with repressing what we ought to root out, and with cutting off the evil act when we ought to cut off the evil thought, and sometimes with confessing and lamenting without any effort to amend. It seems, indeed, at first sight almost inconceivable that a Christian should allow any sin to remain an undisturbed tenant of his heart. But, alas! Christians are strangely inconsistent. And it is marvellous to see how, in the same heart, much good and much evil will sometimes grow up side by side, and how a treacherous peace will sometimes be made between them; and the man who is under a vow to extirpate all evil from within him will be content if he can keep the evil within the limits which his habits have imposed on it, and will flinch from doing more. It is marvellous to see how long the two powers, the Spirit of God, and the spirit of the devil, may apparently divide

the man's soul without contention. We know, when we think of it, that it cannot be right; we know that it cannot end well; we know that this sort of peace is a peace in the devil's favour; but, brethren, for all our knowledge, we are apt to slip into the delusion, and sometimes to remain in it for years.

Thus, for instance, there are faults which we confess and lament and never make any real effort to cure. How often does a bad-tempered man, after his fit is over, lament over his ill-temper, and yet never once have a regular battle with it the next time that he is tempted. He will even plead his own infirmity to his friends as an excuse, and the excuse would be reasonable if he were really trying to mend. But the same excuse that he pleads to others to extenuate his conduct, the same he pleads to himself as a reason for his spiritual indolence. He assumes that it is his nature, and that it is useless to dream of changing it. Perhaps he has once in his life made an effort; perhaps he has made many efforts; and made them hitherto in vain. Nay, perhaps he has struggled with it till he has been driven to despair, and has given up the battle, not because he has lost the wish to fight, but because he has lost all hope to win. Now, what is his sin?—is it the being beaten in his endeavours to subdue himself? No; it is in his ceasing from those endeavours. Whatever was the reason, whether weakness, or sluggishness, or even despair, he had no right, he has no right, to stand still and say he will fight no

more. He had no right to despair, for God hath promised us the victory; and though, for our own good, He sometimes will delay the fulfilment of those promises, yet most certainly He will not break them. And even if the victory over infirmities be not given (as in some instances it will not be given) till we have reached the other world, still we must fight to the last, and never be content to lament what we ought to resist. In the same way are we often tempted to treat vanity and conceit. We are tempted to feel annoyed at our weakness afterwards, and yet to yield without a struggle to the very next temptation. The opportunity for indulging our own love of display finds us ready for display; when the opportunity is over, and the fault is done, we feel vexed that we should have been so silly. But our vexation refers to the past and not to the future, and hardly prompts a single vigorous effort to escape from the dominion of so degrading a weakness. In the same way, again, do we often treat indolence. We are idle at the time when exertion would be useful; we regret the neglect of duty when it is too late to retrieve it; but our regret is not strong enough to make us energetic when next we are called to labour and tempted to idleness. Brethren, this captivity to which we submit so contentedly, this captivity whereby one man is a slave to his temper, another to his vanity, another to his idleness, is the same sort of thing as the abject slavery of the drunkard, who passes his miserable days between a bitter

but unavailing remorse and a repetition of the sin which he hates but cannot quit. In his case, unhappy wretch, you see the true nature of the sin; you see how he groans under his burden, how his days are divided between wretchedness and brutality, how his nights are either full of the horrors of hell or of degrading stupidity. But take care lest you have a little, perhaps not a little, of the same condemnation. For if his sin be the greater, so is his temptation: see whether half his efforts would not be enough to set you free at once. And be you sure that sorrow without resolute effort at amendment is one of the most contemptible of all human frailties; deserving to be despised by men, and certain to be rejected by God.

But this is not the only way in which we are tempted to stand still when we ought to be pressing forward. Sometimes our sins sit so easy on us that we do not even lament them. We do not sorrow without amendment, because we do not sorrow at all. Thus, for instance, how very easy it is to be selfish, and yet hardly to be aware of our own selfishness. It is possible to persist in so perpetual a preference of our own whim, our own pleasure, our own indulgence, that at last we take the largest share of everything that pleases us, just as if it were our natural right. It is possible so systematically and invariably to claim a selfish precedence, that at last we forget that it is selfish. And still more is it possible to indulge an unacknowledged selfishness in pleasures

and enjoyments which God has put absolutely into our own power, and which therefore we need not claim at all, but simply keep. Think of the parable of the rich man and Lazarus. What was the sin for which the rich man was punished with torments of fire? Was it not a selfish life? We hear of no positive breach of God's commandments; we are told of no single gross sin. But the man broke all the commandments at once by the character of his life. He was God's steward, entrusted with worldly goods for the benefit of his fellow-creatures; and he spent all on his own selfish enjoyment. Now all men, whether rich or poor, can copy this rich man. All, whether rich or poor, are tempted to spend on themselves much, and on God's service little. I have seen many an instance of a very poor man doing precisely the same thing; spending at the ale-house what he ought to spend on his family, and indulging himself at the cost of his wife and children. All, whether rich or poor, are tempted to be selfish. But the point that I now wish you to observe is, that the selfish man is too often very little aware of his own sin. You may depend upon it that such a rich man as is described in the parable would have been very much astonished if you had accused him of sinful selfishness. 'I do not take what belongs to others,' he would say; 'I only spend on myself what belongs to myself. How can that be sinful?' Such selfishness does not pass unreproved by conscience; every now and then secret whispers will disturb the soul, and, blessed be God,

any man who is but half a Christian will often be stung and roused by such whispers, asking whether this is really the self-sacrifice which Christ requires, whether we are really taking up our cross, whether we are really loving Christ above everything on earth. But yet, though such whispers will every now and then with a gentle sharpness sound in our souls, such is the lulling power of selfishness that even a good man will often be only half aware how selfish he is, and will not battle with it half as much as he ought. Another sin, which we cherish almost without knowing it, is pride. A man who rarely shews, or indeed feels pride at other times, yet will feel it directly if fault be found with him, even by one who has right and authority to do so. He will not only feel pain, which is right, but he will feel anger and resentment, which is wrong. He will not only look into himself, which he ought, but he will be inclined to accuse his reprover. This is unquestionably pride, and yet so little seen that it is little resisted. Once more, in regard to all those sins about which no one knows but ourselves, we are very apt to be lamentably weak, and to forget their real sinfulness. There is a terrible danger to the soul in secrecy. A sin which comes before the eyes of our fellow-men is sure to awake our consciences. A look from another man's face has a wonderful power to reveal to us how wrong is the wrong that we have done or are doing. A word of condemnation from another man's lips will sometimes arm the conscience with a whip,

wherewith we are scourged for weeks together. A fault of which we had thought nothing, often assumes its true proportions in a moment when we have heard how another man regards it. And so, too, when our consciences are deprived of this help, they are often not half severe enough, and we think little of most grievous sins. A secret sin may go on perhaps for years, and the sinner shall wear a face of seriousness, and shall win the respect of his fellows, and shall be earnest in the discharge of many duties; and then, when the sin is found out, men will say, What a hypocrite! No, brethren, the man was not a hypocrite. But he got so accustomed to his sin that he never felt how sinful it was till detection and the shame of detection awoke him on a sudden. Secrecy was his snare; and let every Christian look well that his own secret life be such that he shall not himself pass a very different judgment on it when it is laid bare on the Judgment-day from that which he passes on it now.

I have given you these instances to shew you what I mean by standing still. I mean being content with yourself; content to struggle no more against the evil within you; content with the poor victory you have already gained, and making no effort to lift yourself ever higher and higher, nearer and nearer to the pattern of Christ. This is a sin; and you may not plead that you had done much; for much is not enough if you could do no more. While there is left in you a trace of ill-

temper, or of vanity, of pride, or of selfishness; while there is left in you a single sin, or germ of sin, you must not rest from the battle. God does not require from you to be sinless when you come before Him, but He does require you to be unceasing in your perseverance. He does not require that you shall never have fallen; but He does require unwearied efforts. He does not require you to win, but He does require you to fight.

This is the warning which we get from St. Paul's example, but we also get encouragement and comfort. For surely it is no slight encouragement to know that this battle which tries us so sorely was once fought by great Apostles and Saints. The battle with sin differs in different men. With some, perhaps, it is no more than an occasional sharp conflict: with some it is a terrible agony: with some men it lasts very long and leaves on the heart grievous wounds; scorching memories of mischief done long ago to their own souls or to the souls of others; an abiding weakness which makes many an innocent enjoyment a snare because associated with evil thoughts, and, perhaps, defiled with evil indulgence: with all men it is a never-ending fight in which victory only leads to fresh contests, and not to fight is the worst of all defeats. And if any man compares his own soul with the picture drawn in the New Testament of what a Christian out to be; if any man fixes his eye on the pattern of self-sacrifice, of purity, of truth, of tenderness, and measures his own distance from that standard, he

might be ready to despair. But let him think of St. Paul's confession about himself and take comfort. To find a thorn in the flesh; to find that even prayer will not get rid of it; to find the battle lasting into old age is not your lot only, O, trembling and fainting Christian! but it was once St. Paul's; and the grace which was sufficient for him will be sufficient for you. Fear not, because you are far from being like the pattern set before you; fear not because your faults are painful to think of: continue the battle and fear not. If, indeed, you are content with yourself, and are making no endeavour to rise above the poor level at which you now stand, then there is reason to fear. But if you are fighting with all your might, fear not, however often you may have fallen, however deeply, however ungratefully, however inexcusably. He will not quench the smoking flax. The spark which still burns feebly in your soul was kindled by Himself, and if you do not quench it yourself, be sure that He will not do so. He will not break the bruised reed. The burden of sin which now bows you down is a blessed weight sent in mercy from His own hand, and He will adjust it to your strength. Fear not because you can give to God no more than such an imperfect service. Such a service is all that we have to give, all that God asks. In return for the love which brought the Son of Man down from heaven, in return for the love which led Him to die for us on the Cross, we cannot give Him holy lives, for our lives are not holy; we

cannot give Him pure souls, for our souls are not pure; but this one thing we can give, and this is what He asks, hearts that shall never cease from this day forward, till we reach the grave, to strive to be more like Him; to come nearer to Him; to root out from within us the sin that keeps us from Him. To such a battle, brethren, I call you in His name. And even if at the last day you shall not be able to shew any other service, yet be sure that when thousands of His saints go forth to meet Him, and to shew His triumph, He will turn to embrace with arms of tenderness the poor penitent who has nothing to offer but a life spent in one never-ceasing struggle with himself, an unwearied battle with the faults that had taken possession of his soul. To him will Christ say what He once said to the poor widow: 'She hath cast in more than they all; for she hath cast in all that she had, even all her living.'

SERMON XXVII.

FIXEDNESS OF PURPOSE.

2 CORINTHIANS i. 20.

'For all the promises of God in Him are yea, and in Him Amen, unto the glory of God by us.'

WHEN St. Paul was accused by his opponents at Corinth, of caprice and levity of purpose, his answer, of which the words that I have just read are a part, appeals to the fixedness of purpose in Him Whom the Apostle preached and served, and by Whom he was inspired. He had intended to come to Corinth somewhat before the time when he was writing; and he had let the Corinthians know of his intention; but for reasons of sufficient weight he changed his intention, and so his opponents accused him of lightness, and with saying yea one day and nay another. He replies that the Son of God, the object of all his preaching, and, therefore, at once the orderer and the pattern of all his steps, was incapable of anything like vacillation. An unchangeable purpose could be read in the life and character of the Lord, and that purpose was the fulfilment of the promises of God—a fulfilment

which God Himself was ever working out, both in Christ and in all Christians, by the power of the Spirit, whereby we are all sealed as His. St. Paul could not be capricious because His Lord and Master could not, and because that Lord and Master had sent His Spirit into the hearts of His disciples to be their guide and strength.

Now, there are here two things which I wish to speak of more at length. On the one hand, there is the fixed purpose of our Lord Christ, and on the other, there is the corresponding steadiness of purpose, which marks, or ought to mark, all Christ's servants.

The fixed purpose of Christ is described in the text. 'All the promises of God in Him are yea, and in Him Amen, unto the glory of God by us.' In fact, He came on earth to fulfil the promises of God. And, no doubt, when the Apostle, a Hebrew of the Hebrews, spoke of the promises of God, the first thought that would arise in his mind would be the promises to the people of Israel: the promises of dominion and supremacy; the brilliant pictures of the Prophets; the glories foreshadowed in the lives of David and Solomon; the majesty and excellence implied in the very fact that they were the people of God's choice. And if this thought passed, as of course it must have passed, beyond the limits of Israel after the flesh, still the promises would be the same, only in a spiritual form: the glory of the new Israel, the new Jerusalem, the new Law, the new Covenant; promises made under a figure, but holding good in their essence even when the

figure exists no longer. Such, perhaps, would hardly be the first thought suggested to one of us by the promises of God; and, indeed, would not be the last or the crowning thought in the mind of the Apostle of the Gentiles. Far deeper and older than these are the promises which God has written with His own finger, not on tables of stone, but on the fleshly tables of the heart of man. These promises, the earliest of all God's revelations, made to mankind before even the oldest Book in the Bible was written; these promises which the loving heart finds repeated in every page of the Bible; these promises which the Bible often reveals to us in so strange a way, making us quite unable to tell whether the word within or the word without, whether the yearnings of conscience or the oracles of the Scripture, first pronounced them in our spiritual ears; these are above all the promises which Christ came to ratify and fulfil. Far deep in the heart of man there speaks a voice which calls us to God, and promises to take us to Him. And in former days, no doubt, when it spoke to heathens who had no revelation to interpret or confirm its sayings, what it said must have been often strange, inarticulate, even unintelligible. In dumb instincts rather than in plain commands, in voiceless longings, in yearnings for something unearthly, in strange doubts and questions did it often speak to men who had no other teaching. And even now, to those who have the Bible in their hands, but are still unawakened, or only half awakened, the voices

that call from the deep abysses of the soul are faint, and strange, and hard to understand, and often seem hopelessly impossible to obey. The Bible is, as it were, the grammar and the dictionary of this spiritual language, and teaches us to interpret its accents into duties, and prayers, and hopes, and battle, and assurance of victory. But even when we have the Bible, how much study we need before we can fathom the depths of spiritual meaning contained in the everlasting promises which God's finger hath written on the soul of man. I said that men, still unawakened, or only half awakened, could not, even with the Bible in their hands, always translate the language of the spirit that speaks within them. But even the awakened, in our human sense of the word awakened, what can they do but see in a glass darkly the dim reflection of the truth of God? Yet what they see is the never-dying truth, and that truth received its final seal in the life of Christ.

It was to confirm and fulfil these ancient, these undying promises, that Christ came down to earth. The Heathen, who only knew the promise as revealed within himself, who only heard by accident, as it were, by fits and starts, faint calls from a distant land, faint promises of an unknown perfection, may well have doubted whether these strange voices so like, and yet so unlike, to all the world around him, did really come from a Power that could fulfil its words, and could work the strange miracle which those words seemed to promise. To such a seeker

after truth, the life and death of Christ, the love and sufferings of Christ, were the fullest answers. Here written, not in the human language of speech, but in the Divine language of a life and character, were those promises repeated, interpreted, and confirmed. Here could be seen the proof that the promises of the heart and conscience were the promises of God; for here were seen in one Person at once the beauty of life which belongs to Divinity, and the love which answers to these yearnings of the human heart. He who studied the pattern set before him in the Person of Christ could never fail to recognise that He came from God; and at the same time, in answer to every anxious question whether the spirit of man spoke the truth when it promised a higher being, and a purer happiness, and a larger nature, that life of Christ, as it were, with the authority of God, for ever answers yea, and for ever Amen.

And so, too, if the Jew sometimes read his law with doubts and unhappy, though repressed, self-questioning, and wondered why God tarried so long, and whether indeed the promised redemption were to ever come, and whether perhaps, after all, the whole might not be a fearful delusion; if he began to give way to his repeated disappointment, and to think that if the oracle were not absolutely false, yet at any rate the promises had somehow been forfeited for ever, to him the same life of Christ would give the same everlasting yea, the same never-changed Amen.

And we, too, find the same promises, and, side by side with them, the same doubts and hesitations. We, too, feel these impulses and hear these voices. And though the revelation of God makes their meaning clear to us, with a light unknown in Heathen or in Jewish days, yet we, too, can very often hardly feel sure of all that the promises mean, still less that all their meaning will be fulfilled. We find these promises of God perpetually speaking to us in the invitations of conscience, and we are perpetually reading them in the Bible. We find them, too, in the very restlessness of our souls discontented with ourselves and with our own characters; in strange longings for some great change; in desires to live unlike all that we see around us; in wishes for greatness, for strength, for liberty; in hopes that we cannot define; in admiration of noble characters whom we know not how to imitate; in disappointment with ourselves; in a consciousness that our secret souls are quite unlike what our lives make them appear to be. And besides these general promises to every man that has a heart, we ever seem to hear a special promise, each for his own self, of some one peculiar pattern. And then the very character of such inward impulses and hopes would make us doubt their value. We aim at what we cannot accomplish. We fail in the very easiest spiritual tasks. We are beaten where we felt secure. Our highest and best impulses seem always to turn into dreams when we try to put them into practice. And this goes on long after we have begun, by

the aid of the Bible, to understand what all these inward voices mean, and in what direction they point. We understand, in fact, quite enough to give us light and guidance. But still we doubt. We doubt whether these promises have strength as well as truth, and whether they are not mocking voices calling us over mountains which we can never climb. And still to us there is the same answer, and that answer is the life of Christ. To every doubt about our duty, and about our Father's love, and about our own hope of reaching Him, the life of Christ for ever answers, 'Yea,' and for ever, 'Amen.'

Yea, they are the promises of God; yea, they are certain to be fulfilled; yea, you shall have strength to share in their fulfilment; yea, they can lift you out of the deepest mire; they can uphold the most crippled limbs; they can fetch you from the furthest distance. You may trust them when they call; you may follow them where they lead; you may hold by them in the darkness; you may call upon their aid when you are defeated: for to all of them the life of Christ, the love and holiness that speak in His life and death, for ever say, 'Yea,' and for ever, 'Amen.'

This is the fixed purpose of Christ, to fulfil the promises of God; and so the servants of Christ will reflect in their lives the same fixed purpose, which shall grow with their growth, and increase with their strength, and give steadiness to their youth, and energy to their manhood, and fire to their old age. For how can he vacillate or change

who has the deep purpose of his life at once called into activity, and upheld with unchanging firmness, by the knowledge of the power of Christ.

And yet is this a true picture? We who are the servants of Christ, can we say that one growing purpose is filling our lives with its power, and bearing us along in one unswerving course? The steadiness of purpose in very bad men; the neglect of no opportunities, of no instruments, through their lives; the sacrifice of inclinations, and sometimes of cherished inclinations; for the sake of some one paramount object; their labour and toil, their vigilance and self-control, have in all ages put to shame the weakness and inconsistency of those who profess to be children of God. There are not a few who have no purpose at all, who simply care for the pleasure of the moment. There are some who have, perhaps, learnt not to be quite indiscriminate in their choice of these pleasures; who will avoid those which bring punishment of whatever kind. There are some, again, who care enough for conscience to use it as a sort of negative guide, and obey it when it positively forbids. But is this to be all? Is there to be no aim before our eyes?—is there to be no prize which we are to win?

Do not let any one fancy that he is too young as yet to have any purpose at all. Want of years, and consequent want both of knowledge and of strength, may make the purpose that suits our life a more childish one, or a narrower one, or in some sense a lower one. To form

plans for future life, to determine on devotion that you do not yet know will be wanted, to imagine sacrifices, and propose to yourself to make them,—these, indeed, are purposes unnecessary and unsuitable. But no one is too young to wish with all his heart to please God and to obey His commandments. And this, in the various forms which it will assume as we grow older, is the one purpose that absorbs all others. This suits all ages, and to all ages will assuredly bring a gradual but firm assurance that Christ will one day fulfil it. This purpose will ever expand as our souls expand; will ever shew us, in larger and clearer characters, the true reading of those promises of God, to which Christ has answered 'Yea;' will ever give us a more positive certainty that Christ's answer is the truth. And in making it our purpose to please God, we have not to think so much of what we are to do, but what we are to be: what we are to *be* now, this very moment. We are to be His children; we are not to go in search of work to do for Him, or fancy that we must wait for further guidance. But we are to be His children; and, holding that purpose fast, we are to try to please Him, not so much by heavenly work, for He hath not sent us any to be done, but by the perfection, the heavenliness, the simple-heartedness of our daily obedience. If your duty calls you to kindness, make that kindness, however trifling, as truly kind, as free from taint of selfishness, as you possibly can. If your duty calls on you for truth, let your truth be exact and careful. If your duty calls you

to avoid temptation, make your avoidance as complete, as ready, as cheerful, as it can be made. Into every duty pour the completeness of a Christian act. And if you think of the future, endeavour to write on your soul the steady determination to make your secret character as near as you can to the pattern which God's hidden promises shall tell you was meant to be yours, and which Christ's everlasting 'Yea' shall offer for your own.

SERMON XXVIII.

STRENGTH A DUTY.

PHILIPPIANS iv. 13.

'I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.'

It is quite certain that the Apostle is not here speaking of a gift given to him as an Apostle, in which other Christians did not, and do not, share. He means to say the same of all Christians that he says of himself. He had the weaknesses that other Christians have. In particular, he had that thorn in the flesh which made him beseech the Lord thrice that it might depart from him. But the answer that was then given to him is also given to us; 'My grace is sufficient for thee, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.' No Christian has a right to say or to think that a temptation has been too much for him. His fellow-Christians may pity and even palliate; his fellow-Christians may feel doubtful whether in the same trial they would not equally have fallen. But neither his fellow-Christians, nor, still less, he himself can dare to say that the needful

strength was not given him, and that he was simply unable to obey his conscience. This, indeed, is not, as a general rule, a conviction for which we need a revelation. If ever we do wrong, our conscience, if we will but listen, will invariably tell us that we need not have done the wrong, and that if we had chosen to use it, the strength was within our reach. Nay, even in those rare instances where the temptation so falls in with our weakness, that a bystander, who knows us thoroughly, would anticipate our fall with something like certainty, even in those cases we know that we have it within us, if we but choose, suddenly to rise up stronger than all anticipation, and to falsify even most intimate knowledge by our resolute refusal to sin. It is, indeed, by such unexpected victories over foes whom all that know us would expect to triumph over us, that we make those starts in our spiritual growth which more perhaps than anything else give us an immediate consciousness that God is carrying us along. But whether we do gain such victories or not, we know that we can: we know it with a certainty that no experience can utterly obliterate. For even when a life of sin has bound us with chains of iron, there still remains a faint whisper deep within, which declares that these chains can and ought to be broken.

This power of the human will to rise above all circumstances, all fetters of habit, all seductions of pleasure, or

association, or custom, is older even than the Gospel. It is the secret working of the power of the Atonement of Christ, working even in those who have never heard of that Atonement. It is the mysterious grace of God, shed even on men who never heard His name, just as He causeth His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and unjust. But unaided by the power of revelation on the heart, it is so weak a power, so bare a preponderance on the side of human strength, that we might, humanly speaking, not go far wrong in denying its existence, and might almost say broadly, that no man without the aid of the Bible, and the teaching of the Bible, could live a holy life. The great lights of Heathen History would refute us indeed if we ventured to make our assertion universal. We could not, in the face of our knowledge, deny that even in Heathen times God's grace has sometimes prevailed over blindness and weakness, and kindled bright lights which Christians would do well to walk by. But these were extraordinary men; acknowledged in their own day to be extraordinary; just numerous enough to shew the possibility of obedience to a higher law, but no more. Let it be granted, that unaided by Revelation the human will is generally too weak to walk on the straight and difficult path, still this will not avail as an excuse for us who have the aid of Revelation, and know the source of our strength.

There are two quite different reasons which make men

plead that they are too weak to obey God and their own conscience: one is, that they have never really tried; the other, that they have tried often, perhaps very often, and failed.

This plea, when made by those who have never tried, is of course worthless; and at first sight we are inclined to dismiss it, as one that we do not make, and do not mean to make, and which, indeed, is only made by the worldly and profane. It is, of course, the plea of the worldly and profane. The worldly man, when pressed to live unto God, habitually takes refuge in a disbelief that any one ever does anything of the sort. Some will call an attempt to live by a really high standard, hypocrisy; and will eagerly pick out faults and inconsistencies in those who profess it, and endeavour to expose them. Others, again, will look upon such lofty attempts as silly dreams; romantic endeavours to compass impossibilities; folly, and perhaps worse than folly, because taking the mind away from realities. Others, again, will prophesy the speedy end of such foolish and high-flown visions. And all this is especially to be expected if, by any chance, a Christian feels called upon to differ from the current opinion of the place and society in which he is living. If he condemns what has generally been allowed, if he condemns severely what has generally been treated as a trifle, if he refuses to join in what he thinks wrong, though all his fellows think it quite allowable, the opposition that he provokes often takes

the form of a denunciation of an impossible standard. I am not now speaking of the case of a real difference of opinion: when one thinks wrong what the rest, in their consciences, do not think wrong; or when one considers a downright duty what the others, even in their secret hearts, do not think a duty at all. But I am speaking of the common case of our condemning and discountenancing what the rest cannot defend and yet refuse to condemn. The refusal to condemn generally takes the form of a protest against impossible standards; and therefore they involve a plain contradiction of the Apostle's teaching, that a Christian can do all things through Christ that strengtheneth him. And this protest against impossibilities is by no means confined to those nice and difficult cases where there really is room for argument on which side the precise duty lies. Those who are not in earnest about religion will protest against impossible standards even when the standard called impossible is plainly and unmistakeably set before their eyes in the Word of God; even when there is no doubt, and can be no doubt, about the fact that the standard is set up by conscience. When we read in an old author of men who imposed strange tasks on themselves,—such as to speak no untruth for a whole month together, to keep the body pure for several weeks, and the like,—we cannot help smiling. But in reality it is not difficult to bring yourself to such a state that resolutions like these should seem

strange and almost impracticable. I said just now that we were inclined to dismiss, as inapplicable to ourselves, the danger of pleading impossibility when, in reality, we had never tried to do the so-called impossible duty, and therefore could not know whether it is impossible or not. But, indeed, if we are tempted to treat the danger as no danger to us, we are much mistaken. There is no commoner danger than that of accepting the code of the society in which you live as the rule of right. And every society, of whatever kind, almost invariably forms such a code. Every profession makes a code of its own. Every district in a country makes a code of its own. Every class in society makes a code of its own. A school like this makes a code of its own. And these codes do not *always*, perhaps, differ from the code of duty given in the Bible, except that each of them alters the relative importance of duties very much, and lays great stress on this and little stress on that, not in accordance with the greater or less degree of godliness or sin in each case, but in accordance with quite other reasons, dependent generally on the interests, or wishes, or pleasures of the little circle from which the code proceeds. But sometimes they go beyond this, and distinctly differ from the law of God, and perhaps even contradict it. For instance, in the morality of trade, how often do we see conduct treated lightly which is plainly wrong; in the morality of gentlemen, the code of honour as it is called, how much there has often been, and still is, which

meets with positive applause, and yet is indefensible. And so, in all cases, even if the morality of the circle to which we belong is not plainly against God's Law, it very often indeed falls miserably short. And what is the temptation when any one endeavours to rise above it or calls others to do so? Is it not to answer, I am only doing what others do, no man could live if he followed your rules; life would be unbearable; or, you would rob us of all pleasure; or, you would break down our spirit; or, the like; in short, what you ask is impossible. Brethren, all good has been, at different times in the world's course, impossible. Nothing worth doing has not at one time seemed quite impossible. If ever a plain duty is called impossible, then be you sure that no time must be lost in doing it. If once things have come to such a pass that a plain duty, I do not say a great or important duty, but a plain duty, though ever so small and unimportant, is called impossible, that proves that instant change is needed; and the way to begin is to do the impossible thing at once, and be you sure that Christ will make it possible.

How very, very different is the same plea of impossibility in the mouth of one from whom it has been wrung by repeated failures. He generally is the very last that would have called anything impossible beforehand. One generally that began by exulting in the strength that God had given him; often faulty, perhaps, yet with no consciousness of habitual sin, but able to turn instantly to his

Lord and to get forgiveness and strength, and to go on once more, humbled and yet rejoicing; confident, perhaps too confident, and therefore careless into what temptation he went, because he felt so sure that God would uphold him; and forgetful that he needed God's help, but far, very far removed from that trembling, clinging dependence which he needed in the path that he chose. Upon his troubled conscience first comes the knowledge that sins, which he fancied were so superficial that a few years running in the race appointed for him would shake them off, were in reality deep-rooted in his very nature, and would need a life-long battle. And then comes the more earnest struggle; not a mere repentance which is satisfied with tears and resolutions of amendment, but something like a consciousness of the terrible power of his foe, and a more guarded walk, and an avoidance of temptations, now at last discovered to be temptations. And then comes the thick gathering of the power of evil on his weaker side: the frequent fall, the bitter remorse, the apparently unavailing prayer, the passionate repentance, so passionate and yet almost despairing in its passion. And then come the fits of despair, not settled perhaps, but alternating with calmer moods and with stray hopes. And his besetting sin seems to leaven all his thoughts, and to mix itself with all his occupations, and to fasten associations of evil on every incident of his daily life, and to fill the whole world with new temptations which he cannot avoid. If his sin be a bodily

sin, how it will haunt his thoughts, and leave no repose to his imagination. Nay, how it will torment him by its very remissions; leaving him absolutely for a time, and making him fancy that he had at length gained a victory, and then returning irresistible like the tide, and washing away all the good that he had built on such a sandy delusion. If he be tempted to untruth, how often he will be entangled in it, almost by mere custom, mechanically, without quite knowing it; and then be led on step by step till he finds himself uttering a deliberate falsehood. If he be tempted by violent temper, how it will come back on him all in a moment, making him do what he would give worlds never to have done, still more making him say what all his life long he will reproach himself for having said. If he be tempted to idleness, how will good resolutions melt away, as it were, in the very act of use; how will little disappointments rob him of all heart, and throw him back, and undo the work of weeks, or even months. Even from real children of God, even from those who have longed, who still long, to be servants of Christ, such experience as this will wring the plea of despair, 'I cannot do the things that I would; to will is present with me, but how to perform that which is good I find not.'

And yet through it all there is ever the warning and condemnation of conscience, which we cannot and dare not silence. You had the strength, if you had only had the will. Did you, do you now, really will? Are you

not praying, as St. Augustine once tells us that he prayed, 'O Lord, give me purity, but not yet'? Do you not still cling to some part of the sin? Do you not still hope, by some magic, to save the pleasure of it while you give up the sin itself? You wish for freedom from the bondage of evil habits and an evil nature. But are you willing to pay the price that God has put upon it? God will give you strength if you are really in earnest? but He will not accept any proof of earnestness short of absolute surrender. If you dally with the temptation; if you still wish to keep what the sin gets for you, whatever enjoyment that may be; if you still indulge in kindred faults which have not, as yet, troubled your conscience so much, but are still plainly forbidden; how can you say that you have the will?

Oh, look not for the reason of your fall to your weakness; you are weak, but God is mighty, and your weakness shall only bring down a double portion of Christ's strength. Say not, when you fall, that you cannot stand upright; for God will certainly hold you up. Look not there for the evil; but look to the want of singleness in your aim, to the divided hopes, to the double service. Unless you make your duty your first consideration, with which nothing else shall ever interfere; unless you make the love of your Master the spring of your life, and allow no other thought to weigh one moment against His approval; unless you

look forward to playing your part in the world where He has placed you, as a true soldier, in His Heavenly Host, and bend all your energies to fit yourself to be a Christian man,—you cannot say that you have done your part.

SERMON XXIX.

SEASONS OF PENITENCE.

PSALM xlii. 1—3.

'As the hart panteth after the water-brooks, so panteth my soul after Thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God: when shall I come and appear before God? My tears have been my meat day and night, while they continually say unto me, Where is thy God?'

THIS Psalm expresses the feelings which first induced men to keep seasons such as Lent. The Psalmist is evidently writing in the greatest distress; perhaps he was a captive at that moment, being hurried away from home; he is in the land of Jordan, and near the hill of Hermon; and he is longing all the while to be at Jerusalem joining in the worship that he loved. When, he asks, shall I come to appear in the presence of God? And his enemies taunt him in his distress, saying continually, 'Where is thy God?' 'Where is the Deliverer whom thou servest? and why cannot He save thee from suffering such misery?' And so his tears are his meat day and night, and the reproaches of these bitter foes are like a sword going through his bones. In such a case it is that men forget

to eat their bread and mingle their drink with weeping. In such a case the children of the Bride-chamber fast because the Bridegroom has been taken away from them. In the bereavement of their souls how can they do anything but mourn.

The Christian must often share feelings such as these. The iron fetters of his oppressors, namely, the sins which are ever besetting him, are sore and heavy. These fearful foes which he bears within his own bosom; sins of unrestrained appetite; sins that spring of past habits; sins of criminal weakness and cowardice; they triumph over him sometimes, and when he falls, they seem to say, 'Where is thy God?' And what pain is equal to the sting which they can thus inflict on a religious conscience? And is it not indeed like a sword in the bones? But it is not his fall only and God's absence that afflict him. It is that he knows how these enemies are carrying him away—carrying him into captivity—and he knows not how or when he shall again return to appear in the presence of his God. He mingles prayers with expressions of trust. At one moment he says to his God, 'Why hast Thou forgotten me? Why go I mourning because of the oppression of the enemy?' At another he exclaims, 'Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise Him Who is the health of my countenance and my God.' And through it all the one great desire is to dwell in God's presence; to feel that God

is with him, and he with God; to wake up and do the duty of the day, conscious of God's tenderness; and to lie down to sleep at night trusting to God's care.

And such feelings must often pass through the Christian's heart; for often do our sins appear to bear us away from our Redeemer, and often are we tempted by repeated falls to say to ourselves, 'Where is thy God?' Where is that redemption which was to sustain thy soul? Where is the promise of Christ to grant His grace, sufficient for thee in thy need? Where is the promised help in the hour of temptation and weakness? alas! 'Where is thy God?' And, again, there are times not assuredly of equal pain, yet of much real suffering, when the thought of what we have had done for us, and what we have received, and how we have received it; when the contrast between what we might be, and what we ought to be, with what we now are; when the accumulated proofs thickly scattered over our life, of a weak will, and a poor shallow love, and a heartless selfishness of spirit; when all these thoughts bow down our souls, and bid us go to Christ, and the Cross of Christ, and kneel down in sorrow and in penitence. Such emotions must be stirred within us whether we will or no, in some degree, as the returning year brings back the memory of the great events in the life of our Master. Can we quite unmoved enter upon this season of Lent which commemorates the approach of His Passion? Can we recall the forty days in the Wilderness of Judea without a throb of feeling? Think

of our Lord, as at this time, retiring to the long fast and prayer with which He commenced His public life. Think of Him in the Wilderness for those forty days; alone with God in fervent prayer; without thought of food; seeking no shelter; in the midst of the wild beasts of the forest; His whole soul wrapped up in the redemption of our souls which He was then to begin. Think of the depth of love implied in all this suffering, of the earnestness and reality of purpose, of the utter self-denial. Is it possible for a Christian, even if sins, lately committed, have not bowed down his head in shame, not to feel how poor and worthless he is in comparison with the price at which he has been purchased? Is it possible not to join from sheer sympathy in something like the same disregard of personal comfort, in something like the same contempt for all pleasure and all worldly honour in comparison with the soul's demands, with the high and holy duties which God's Spirit preaches within our hearts.

No Christian can help feeling this in some degree. It may, indeed, be needful to keep this feeling, as it is needful to keep all feelings, within due limits. A mere succession of emotions, even if we could ensure such a succession, would bear no such fruit as Christ requires from us. But yet, in their place, we know full well that these emotions are the very mainspring of our religious life. When apathy has silently crept over our souls till we begin, not exactly to disobey, but to be careless

about obedience; when we have wandered away from Christ and from the Cross, not indeed on purpose, but simply from not heeding our steps; when we have allowed little faults unawares to grow into serious sins; when we have let bad habits blunt our consciences till we no longer think much of what once would have made us start; when prayers have become colder and colder, till all the life is gone out of them; when the bustle of the world and the routine of daily tasks have, as it were, filled up our hearts and left no room for God; what shall startle us and bring us back, better than to have our hearts touched and our feelings stirred by the return of a Festival or a Fast unlike common days?

But there are dangers, it may be said, in such observances, and the observances themselves are more like Jewish discipline than Christian liberty. Both these things are true. All observances are, of course, far short of that high state in which no observances are needed. It would be, no doubt, better for all Christians, if we were so perfect that we never needed special reminders. It would be better, for instance, if we were so truly religious that Sunday were no longer necessary for us, if every day were a Sunday, and every day alike witnessed a most religious uplifting of the soul to God and to Christ; if work and worship were so melted together that there was no need to set apart one special day for special worship. But we know perfectly well that we are in no such state, and that, if we were not

to observe Sunday, instead of making the week days more like Sunday, we should assuredly make them even less like Sunday than they are. So, too, is it with seasons of Christian joy or Christian penitence, with Easter and with Lent. We may say that we will not have a special season for penitence; but will make our penitence extend over our whole life, and as we are always sinning, so also be always repenting. But if we try it we find that the result is, that if we are much engaged, as many of us ought to be, in the work which God has given us to do in the world, the penitent spirit, instead of being spread over our lives, threatens to disappear altogether, and our characters sink down to a lower level, less spiritual, less pure, less lofty, less self-denying. We need such seasons in order to keep alive in our minds the high standard by which the pure conscience ought to judge. It is with our souls as with much of our world's business. We know that few things are done well that have no recognised time assigned to them, but are left to be done when occasion serves. And the purifying of our conscience, by steady and earnest meditation on our own lives, is a duty which needs a recognised time as much as anything else that we have to do.

But there is a danger, it is said, lest such observances occupy a wrong place in our minds; lest we begin to lean upon them, and attach value to them; lest we forget that Christ and the Cross of Christ be the one source

of all salvation, and dream that we can cleanse and save our souls by seasons of penitence, and win Heaven by careful keeping of stated seasons. There is such a danger, and a very real danger it is; and there has been a time when the danger was so very serious, and the mischief had already spread so far, that it shook the Church to pieces to set the evil right. But let us not forget that precisely the same danger attends the practice of prayer; and yet no Christian would propose to give up praying, for fear he should be tempted to make a form of it. Nay, even if we found a Christian who had fallen into the snare, and had built his hopes of salvation on the regular performance of his prayers, we should never think of suggesting to him to pray no more. The fact is, that there is no duty, and no devotion, and no expression of religious feeling, which is not liable to this danger. The liability to danger must make us cautious, but if it has done that, it has done all that it was meant to do.

How then ought we in our days to observe seasons such as this of Lent? Not certainly by searching out what men did in old time and copying their conduct; nor by devising strange observances out of our own brains. What comes naturally to us as the fittest expression of serious and penitential feelings, that is at all times the fittest observance of a season of penitence. Religious life in modern times has, as all observant men know, retired inward, as it were, and is much locked up

in a man's own bosom. There, where the religious life has retired, there too, of course, must the religious observances follow. In former days, men used at such times to abstain from food. Such an abstinence would not be natural to us, although we might feel quite as keenly and quite as truly as they did. The natural expression of our feelings is rather that expressed in the verse of the Psalms, 'To commune with our own hearts, and in our chambers.' Real earnest self-examination has taken the place of all other penitential expressions. To force ourselves into the very presence of the great questions of life; to take opportunity to ask, 'Am I really what I ought to be? Am I what, in the bottom of my heart, I honestly wish to be? Am I living a life at all like what I myself approve? My secret nature, the true complexion of my character, is hidden from all men, and only I know it. Is it such as I should be willing to shew? Is my soul at all like what my kindest and most intimate friends believe? Is my heart at all such as I should wish the Searcher of Hearts to judge me by? I have been redeemed, and I know that a power greater than my own is always by me, and that I have but to put out my hand and I can get help to walk even in the worst of paths. Am I remembering this, or frantically forgetting it? Years are passing over me, and every year making me more responsible, bringing me nearer to manhood or nearer to the grave. Is every year adding to my devotion, to my unselfishness, to my conscientiousness,

to my freedom from the hypocrisy of seeming so much better than I am? When I compare myself with last year, am I more ready to surrender myself at the call of duty? am I more alive to the commands of conscience? have I shaken off my besetting sins?' These are the questions which this season of Lent ought to find us putting fairly and honestly to our hearts; on Sundays, when we have time to think much and earnestly; and in the evenings, when we can at least question ourselves upon the events of the day and the character of our present life.

The use of all this questioning is to press nearer, if we can, to the presence of our Master; to shake off the fetters of the world, and escape from the sins which hold us captive, and come back to Him Who is the source of our life. And therefore all this self-searching must be accompanied with prayer, that at every moment we may be reminded of what we really need. There is a wonderful power in the prayer which follows a real searching of the heart. There is a wonderful support to weakness, a wonderful force given to resolution. He who lays bare every thought and deed before God, and then, with the shame and sorrow of one who neither wishes to palliate the fault nor to shun the merciful chastisement, resigns himself to his Redeemer, and, with a prayer that comes from the bottom of his soul, asks for aid against his temptations,—such an one, whether he knows it or not, surely has made a step onward in

his spiritual path; such an one surely has not prayed in vain.

This then is the advice that I would give you for this season of Lent: to add a short petition to your usual prayers that God would give you grace to find out and amend the faults that spoil your character; and to look regularly and closely into your lives, with the best desire to do what you pray God's help towards doing. It may be that when you have looked into your own soul for a little, you may begin to feel that longing for the sense of God's presence, which has ever been the mark of the religious mind in all ages of the world. It may be that you will learn how sins damp the warmth of love, and carry captive the heart, and bring floods and storms upon the soul, and hide away the face of God. It may be that you will learn the depth of the consolation that the thought of Christ can give when it has overshadowed the soul with its wings of healing; and that, even while tears more than ever fill your eyes at the memory of your sinfulness, you will be able to say, 'Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise Him who is the health of my countenance and my God.'

SERMON XXX.

GOD'S INEXHAUSTIBLE LOVE.

ROMANS v. 8.

'But God commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.'

We cannot too often repeat to our hearts that truth which lies at the bottom of all God's dealings with man, that He loves us with a Father's love; that in spite of ignorance, and the deadness and corruption, that is the sure consequence of ignorance; and in spite of pain and sorrow, which sometimes makes men doubt His Providence; and what is more than all, in spite of the sin which casts a thick cloud between us and Him, between our weakness and His Holiness, still He is our Father. He does not become our Father by our love, by our obedience, by our sanctification; He is our Father already. Even if we have ceased to be His children, and our spirits have wandered far from His presence, He does not therefore cease to be our Father. Even if we have brought upon us His anger, still it is the anger of a Father; the anger not of indifference, nor, still less, of hatred, but the anger

of love. We men, when we are angry, are sometimes angry with the anger of hatred, which does not even *desire* a reconciliation, nay, which would be further provoked if reconciliation seemed likely; the anger which hates not the sin but the sinner, and is better pleased that the cause of offence should be maintained, than that all just ground for refusing forgiveness should be taken away. Still more often again we men, even the best of us, must often feel the anger of indifference; the anger which is provoked with the sin, and cares nothing for the sinner either one way or the other. This anger, in its lowest form, is an indignation at some personal annoyance, some invasion of our rights, or supposed rights, some affront to our dignity; in its highest form it is indignation at some wrong act done within our knowledge, some great crime of which we have heard, and which seems to us an outrage on human nature; some perverse self-willed disregard of a plain duty done before our eyes. But in either case the anger implies no regard either of tenderness or of dislike to the doer: it is satisfied with the wrong being either set right, if it is a wrong that can be set right, or properly punished, if it is a wrong that ought to be punished, and, in any case, prevented from recurring; if satisfied in this way it asks no more. But God's anger against sin is not of this sort: it is the anger of love; the anger of the deepest, purest, tenderest love that can be; of a love which we faintly describe by calling it the love of a father; that is the best type of it that we can

find on earth, but even that falls short of it. God's anger never for a moment forgets the sinner in the sin; never for a moment ceases to draw us all with the bands of a man, with cords of love. Even His anger is the anger of a righteous Father who must, by virtue of His absolute Holiness, insist on our living by the laws of Holiness, but whose heart is not turned away. 'Why will ye die, O House of Israel?' was the message which He once sent to His chosen people by the voice of His Prophet. I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, was His account of His own wrath against sin. And if words were not enough to prove to us His unquenchable love, the whole New Testament records a proof surpassing all that could be imagined. It was not to bless the righteous with a fuller measure of blessedness; it was not to crown the strong with His approval of their victory over sin and evil; it was not to lead the holy to the mansions of a Father whom they had never forsaken that He sent His Son to earth; it was to save sinners from their sin, it was to bring back the weak, the silly, the wandering, to purify the unholy, to give peace to the wicked, for whom, as He had said Himself, and as without His Divine aid must ever have been the case, there is no peace. Man did not win His love; it was not, as once He was ready to do for Abraham, for the sake of a few righteous, that He consented to spare the world, and not only to spare, but to save and bless. He loved in the midst of His righteous anger; in the midst of the same anger He loves still. A

father must be angry with a child that does wrong; he must speak sternly; he must maintain his anger while the wrong continues; he cannot sacrifice the eternal and unchangeable laws of right, not even to the love that fills and racks his heart; nay, it is just because he cannot sacrifice the laws of right to His love that He is able to love so much; for love flows out of holiness, and holiness flows in its turn out of love, and they cannot exist apart. A father loves; and just in proportion to his love is his pain when the children of his love do wrong; no other pain can be like that pain; no disappointed affection, no separation to distant lands, no loss by death, can cut the soul with the same wound as the wrong-doing of one on whom the heart is set. A father who sees a loved child dishonour all his love, a sister who sees the brother whom she admires disgracing the picture of him that her mind had drawn, the mother who watches with agony the son of her affections cast himself away on profligate pleasures, is thrilled with a pang whose bitterness stands quite alone. Such pains as these are the measure of that wrath with which God, our Father, tells us that He regards our sins. But in spite of wrath He is still our Father, and still He draws us by all the cords of an infinite love back to Himself again.

Would that we could remember this always. But we let the feeling slip out of our minds, and not merely forget it, but forget it as if we had never known it, as if, indeed, it had never been true at all.

We forget it sometimes in our sorrows. In the troubles that beset our life, whether early or late, God's love is still every moment with us, and every pain is a message from Him. We need such messengers or we should not have them. And their purpose is not to make us unhappy and discontented, but to brace and harden us, to warn and guide us. And since they all come from His hand, nothing on earth can be more absolutely certain than this, that they shall not last for ever. A day will come, assuredly come, when they will not only pass away, but we shall look back upon them with gratitude. Perhaps we shall say, as the Psalm says, 'I will thank the Lord for giving me warning.' Perhaps we shall say, 'It is good for me that I have been in trouble.' It is certain that we shall say, if our hearts are God's, 'Out of them all hath the Lord delivered me;' 'The Lord is my strength and my song, and is become my salvation.' Surely even the youngest here as well as the oldest has already learnt that no troubles last for ever. In our earliest childhood we are troubled with griefs which a few years' experience prove to have been but passing clouds; as we grow older we ever meet with griefs which seem for the moment overwhelming, and yet these too pass away; and so, too, will all sorrows work together for good, for they all come from Him, from our Father, Whose love is veiled behind them. Young and old are alike His children. Let not the youngest fancy that his griefs or his pains are indifferent to God. We men speak of childish sorrows as

trifling matters. But in God's eyes what are we all but children? whose childish sorrows He views with compassion, He tempers with mercy, He blesses with the power of drawing the soul to Himself.

We forget that God is our Father when sorrow overwhelms us. We forget it still more when all is prosperous and happy. Nay, it would be truer to say that in sorrow we are not tempted to forget this truth but to deny it; in happiness we are tempted to forget it. There is, indeed, such a thing as an innocent forgetting. Just as a child may forget the presence of a loved earthly father, because that father is so completely a part of the happiness which is shed around; so, too, the Christian may go on his way rejoicing in what God has bestowed, health and strength and happy thoughts and enjoyments suited to youth, and certainly will not be blamed for letting his thoughts be full of the innocent pleasures that his Father gives. But this forgetfulness of God, which may be innocent in the beginning, is liable to slip into a coldness of love simply by its own continuance. And there is hardly any hardness of heart more impenetrable than that crust which has gathered round the soul from the indulgence, through many years, of an earthly spirit in our pleasures. If we cannot season our pleasures with the salt of unselfishness towards others, of frequent communion with serious thoughts at proper times, of aspirations rising above mere enjoyment, of regular and cheerful discharge of daily duty as its turn comes, above all, of entire surrender of

the heart to God when the time comes for prayer and devotion, they will assuredly change their nature; and though God will not cease to be our Father, we shall imperceptibly cease to be His children. It is the regular daily prayer, it is the serious reflection on what we wish to be and do, it is the serious examination of our own conduct, it is the frequent thought of Christ and of the vocation to which He has called us, which lift our life above the life of beasts or of birds, and fashion us to the mould which God's Spirit is ever striving to create in our souls, the pattern of the mind of Christ.

But above all are we tempted to forget, or to disbelieve, or even to deny that God is our Father, when we have done wrong. And indeed there is a kind of truth in what we feel. For we rightly feel that our wrong-doing has taken us away from Him. His love never ceases for a moment; and behind the veil which our sin has cast up between us and Him, He still is working to bring us back, and still yearning over us as a Father *must* yearn over His children. But we cannot see it. We are shut out of His sight by the frown of our own conscience. Either we dare not, or we feel as if we cannot, claim to be treated as His children. We hold back, with a sort of notion that we have something to do before He will love us again. We feel cast off; out of His sight: we feel as if it were useless now to try to hold a place in His love, that place which our misdeed has forfeited: too often we add sin to sin in a kind of recklessness, because it seems not

worth while to battle for a completely lost cause. But this is a temptation of our weak nature; and not the direction of conscience, nor the teaching of the Bible. Remember the case of David. He had committed two of the very worst sins that a man could commit; and a Prophet was sent to reprove him. 'Thou art the man,' said Nathan to David. David's immediate reply was an expression of repentant confession; and David said unto Nathan, 'I have sinned against the Lord.' And then follows immediately, 'And Nathan said unto David, The Lord also hath put away thy sin.' This David was called the man after God's own heart; not certainly because he lived a holier life and fell into fewer sins than any other saint whose life is recorded, but because throughout his life, even when past sin was bowing down his soul with its terrors, he never forgot that God was his Father. The ready, instant, complete repentance, the repentance so full that never afterwards is there a trace in his character of anything like the same sin again; the repentance that did not wait for some token to prove that he might return, but, like the prodigal son, went straight home to surrender himself absolutely to his Father,—that was the most marked act in the religious life of the man after God's own heart. And this is the true repentance of a loving child that knows the love of its Father, and has offended against that love: not a slow, lingering repentance doubtful of its own acceptance, but an instant return to absolute submission, an instant prostration of the whole soul before the

feet of God, an instant utterance of shame and grief, an instant abandonment of the discovered evil: not a sullen unwillingness, which gives time for faults to engrain themselves in the character, but an immediate stripping off of the garment spotted by the flesh, that is, of the temptation which has proved too strong for us.

For why was Christ sent but to take on Himself the iniquities of us all, and to make our repentance possible? His work is not left unfinished. If we will but turn to Him, He will bring us to God, even if our sins be scarlet, and even if they be red like blood. I know it may be said that there is danger in telling Christians that, however sinful they may be, God is still their Father, and Christ is still their Redeemer, and God and Christ are yearning for their return. But all doctrines are dangerous in this sense, that they may all be perverted. Yet, nevertheless, this is a truth which the Bible repeats too often to leave its certainty doubtful for a moment. Nay, if God had not still been the Father of sinners, in spite of all their sins, what hope would have been left for us, or how would Christ have come down from Heaven, or how could He have died on the Cross, or what but a Father's love could have sent Him? Yes, even if we sin, let us remember that He is our Father; even if He is angry, and too justly angry, let us remember that it is a Father's anger. And though we may have wandered from His presence, and for a time forgotten that we are His children, let us not wander further away through any sullen doubt of His tenderness,

but instantly come back, come back to His arms. And if, weak as we are, we shall often offend Him, yet let us not make our sin worse by persisting in keeping our hearts away from Him. If we feel cold in heart, let us turn to Him for warmth; if we feel doubtful, let us beg Him to increase our faith; if we have done very wickedly, let us be all the more sorrowful, and all the more earnest in our endeavours to cast out the evil spirit. But let us never forget that He is our Father, and that without our prayer, out of the depths of His love, He sent His Son to bring us back to His Home to Himself.

SERMON XXXI.

SECRET SINS.

ST. JOHN iii. 20, 21.

'For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved: but he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God.'

THE context of this passage shews, that by the word light, the Apostle here understood chiefly that Light of Light which had come into the world to light the steps of men; and by coming to the light, he meant that openness towards our Master, that surrender of all our thoughts, all our feelings, all our wishes to His eye, which more than any other attitude of mind distinguishes the real child of God. We all know that God sees and knows every motion of our hearts. No one among us has any doubt of this as a general statement. But the child of God not only knows this, but feels a blessing in the knowledge; not only is willing that God should search out his heart, but of his own accord lays it

bare, and feels a deep comfort in the thought that below his own faults, and underneath a life of which he is often ashamed, there lies a heart that loves and clings to his Father, and that his Father can see it. To the evil-hearted, to him who is conscious of secret sin wilfully indulged, of a fair outside and a foul soul, there is no sentence more terrible than the words of St. John: 'If our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things.' He is greater than our hearts; He sees through the silly excuses with which we defend ourselves to ourselves; He sees through the veil of dead slumber in which we wrap our souls close round. The doubtful, whispering, fitful accusation with which our hearts condemn us becomes a clear unwavering judgment when pronounced by Him, a judgment that is sure to execute its own doom. But that very word is a comfort and a support to the child of Christ; his heart condemns him, yes, condemns him often; condemns him for many a sin, for many a wilful disobedience; condemns and punishes, too, with very real shame, and with bitterness of spirit, and with self-contempt. But through all this great pain he still knows that his accusing conscience is not his final judge; he knows that there is One even greater than his conscience Who loves him, and Whom, in spite of all, he loves; he knows that there is One who knoweth all things, Who knoweth his struggles, Who knoweth his sorrow, Who knoweth his most secret aims, and hopes, and fears, and on that knowledge he rests.

The very essence and test of all true and intimate friendship in confidence. We measure the degree in which we are brought near to one another by the degree in which we are trusted with each other's secrets, of thought, of hope, of anxiety, of circumstances. The last and fullest proof of Love is perfect openness. And as in human love, so too in divine. To come to the light, not to know that the light is piercing through you, but to come to it of yourself; not to know that God sees your heart, but to strip off all disguise in His presence, to kneel before the Cross, and without waiting till He shall see through you, to ask Him to search out your heart,—that is the token of being God's own child.

This, I say, seems to be the full meaning of the text; but yet the words cover much more than this, and imply, as do many other passages in the Bible, an approval of the open, a disapproval of the dark and close character; an approval of the man whose whole life will bear the full light of day, a disapproval of him who cloaks and hides away all that he can, and wears a face to others which he cannot shew to his own conscience. The deeds of darkness, deeds, that is, whose natural and accustomed place is concealment, deeds that the doers do not wish any other eye to see, are the deeds which God hates. Darkness is the constantly recurring word to denote all that is evil. The kingdom of darkness, the powers of darkness, are the titles of the most evil of all evil things or beings. To deliver from darkness is the office of the

Gospel. To love darkness is the fatal mark which betokens God's rejection. To be of the darkness is the characteristic of not being God's: for God's children are children of the light.

These expressions in the Bible are a voice to which our own natural feelings supply the echo. We have a natural tendency to dislike with peculiar vehemence the life which always hides its deeds in secret places. We have a peculiar admiration for the man whose whole conduct is of a piece, whose faults are visible, who never seems to wear a mask. I know nowhere a praise to which every feeling within us more immediately responds than that which the Poet of our time gave to the late Duke of Wellington,

> 'Whatever records leap to light,
> He never shall be shamed.'

There must be much in every man's life which cannot be known, not because it is hidden on purpose, but because some mere accident has concealed it, or rather because there was no particular reason for telling or publishing it. How much you say of a man when you say that if all these the secret passages of his life were brought before all eyes, still you would find nothing to shame him! And this, observe, implies no superhuman perfection. It is not that the man was faultless either before God, or even before his fellows. It is that he loved not the darkness which cloaks bad deeds, and he lived in secret as he lived in public: it is that he was real in all that he did;

and his every action, good be it, or bad otherwise, was, at any rate, true to himself; it is that there was nothing in him hollow or mean, nothing double, nothing false. To such a character we all pay involuntary homage, and the God who made us has thus written in our hearts this sure testimony, that He loves light and not darkness, nor the character that seeks the darkness.

Yet, again, look on the other side. There is hardly any kind of sin to which God has affixed so severe a punishment here in this life as sins done in secret. Every sin has its appropriate punishment here in this world; not certainly always visible, perhaps not always even certain, for on this I would not dare to pronounce; but yet always in prospect, and almost always inflicted. Sins of appetite generally bring fearful punishment on the body; sins of indolence bring bitter regret for wasted time, loss of due place, inability to reach just and natural hopes, sometimes terrible privation; sins of untruth bring loss of all respect and honour, and deep self-contempt; each sin can be traced out to consequences enough to appal the doer on the very threshold of his folly, if he could but see them full before him. But over and above the punishment which God thus in His mercy inflicts upon every sin, He adds another scourge to the same sin if done in secret, and that is the fear of detection. It is strange that the fear of detection should be so much more hard to bear than the detection itself; but so it certainly is. What can be more miserable than the agony

which every now and then besets the secret sinner when he sees exposure close at hand? What scourge can be more painful than the haunting dread which hunts him up and down like a ghost? It leaves him sometimes, and his spirits return and his face is happy. But the slightest allusion, the slightest hint, though all unintended, is enough to pierce him like a knife. His face burns, his heart beats, if the subject be but approached. His friends can never tell why there are things of which he never loves to speak, which make him always uneasy. But he knows that these subjects are full of danger: he finds them beset with snares: the very mention of them brings back, in all its weight, the burden which his soul cannot shake off. I believe that it rarely, very rarely happens, that secret sins remain always secret. I believe that almost invariably their proper punishment follows, and that years of concealment only dam up the current of recompense, and make its power all the more overwhelming in the end. And thus the unhappy sinner heaps upon his head a double measure; he is punished at last by the sure working of his own misdeeds, and he has borne all the time this miserable burden of a guilty secret. But even if all other punishment could be avoided, still the long-continued, the never quite forgotten dread is in itself so heavy a weight, that hardly any scourge can be conceived equal to its pain.

And along with this fear of detection must be taken the sure self-contempt that invariably attends untruth,

and the thick, thick cloud which stands between the soul and God. Self-respect is impossible as long as we know that we are not what we seem. And the more we strive in all other ways to win a title to our own honour; the more we lift our thoughts above all that is mean, and selfish, and base; the more we fix our affections on things above, where our Master sits on the right hand of God; the more we endeavour in all other ways to surrender our lives to pure and noble purposes, the more bitter still becomes our humiliation at the thought that we have within us a fatal shame, a blot which we dare not shew, a degrading knowledge which, if it were published among our fellows, would blast our fair name and rank us even among those who are now classed far below us. In striving against the sin which doth so easily beset us, we are soon taught how hard the struggle is, how deep the root which sin plants in the soul, how many times we have to fall before God will give us the final victory. But, alas! how tenfold harder is the struggle if our besetting sins be secret. The sin itself binds us with cords; but the secrecy converts those cords to chains of iron, and makes them cut into our very flesh with a keen and biting wound. With shame again and again must we confess to God that we have deserted Him and forgotten all His tenderness. But how one sin mocks our very confession when we have succeeded in concealing it; how our evil nature taunts us with confessing to God what we have taken care to hide from men; how our own

souls despise us when we pour forth our remorse for a sin which our own contrivance has hidden away from the natural punishment of it. It is hard to confess sin to God. It is hard to be quite open in His sight, to lay bare deliberately the evil that we have done, and not to hide away our faces from looking on our wickedness. But how tenfold harder to confess a hidden sin, and to ask God for help while we are conscious that our lives are not true before our fellow-men.

My brethren, the temptation to secret sins is always most severe. And few men can quite come up to that high praise of being perfectly true in all their lives. The evil instinct which bids us hide a wrong thing that we have done rapidly grows into a still worse instinct, which bids us specially guard against those sins which are liable to be found out. Against this let us strive with all our might. Let us press on ourselves this truth, that there is no stronger reason that can possibly be given against doing what is wrong than the fact, if it be a fact, that no one will know it. No one will know it; no one will know anything about it; that is the most seducing argument towards evil when addressed to one whose soul does not belong to God. No one will know anything about it; that is the most conclusive argument against sin when addressed to a child of God. The very fact that it will be secret should make us shrink from any deed that our consciences would not approve. The very fact that it is a deed of darkness should make it tenfold blacker in our

eyes. The very fact that it will make us worse in reality than we are in appearance, the very fact that we shall thus be wearing a fairer character than we have a right to wear, should stamp it as mean and degrading.

My brethren, let us strive to come to the light and live in the light. To live so, that if our most secret conduct were read by all the world, we should be better, not worse, than we are thought to be. To live so, that when our lives are summed up at the Last Day, we shall not be found hollow masks, whited sepulchres, fair to look upon outwardly, but within full of all uncleanness. Let us strive against all sin; but above all other sins, strive against that which is covered by the darkness. If we find any evil in us which especially shuns the light, let us make it our especial task to correct that above all else. Let it be our fixed purpose to win for ourselves that open character which all men can read, whose deeds are laid before all, never to be mistaken. Let us win for ourselves that truth of life which scorns to hide, and hates to be overvalued. Let us, in spite of the pain which it will assuredly give, endeavour with all our might to prevent our life from misleading our fellow-men into respecting what does not deserve respect. Let us shun above all other things, as we would shun a serpent, let us shun the darkness which covers evil.

And He, the Light of Light, will certainly give His especial help, in no ordinary measure, to the man who, for His sake, is striving to live in the light. He will

certainly give, He always gives, a double strength and a deeper sense of His Almighty presence to the soul which is determined never to wear a double character, never to shame our name of Christian by the disgrace of falsehood. He will assuredly be with the soul which determines thus; in the spiritual warfare He will wage the fiercest, the most unremitting, war against the enemy that hides in the dark, and wishes to shame him with cowardice added to all other sin. He will be with us, and will make even the pain which follows upon openness of soul a wholesome medicine of strength to knit our muscles for greater services. And, above all, He will bless the open-hearted man with the highest of all blessings, the sure sense of His presence with him.

SERMON XXXII.

WORLDLINESS.

ROMANS xii. 2.

'Be not conformed to this world.'

THIS may be called the New Testament form of the Second Commandment. The Second Commandment was directed against material idolatry; this is directed against spiritual idolatry. The Second Commandment forbad the worship of stocks and stones, of images, and by implication of all created things. This precept of St. Paul's forbids the submission of the conscience to the rules and ideas of this present world. And so both stand upon the same footing. For in both the mischief to be prevented is the lowering of the idea of God and God's nature. You shall not form your spirit, your conscience, your higher being by any pattern lower than itself. You shall not put what in your secret heart you know to be lower, above that which you know to be higher. You shall not exalt a dead image above your own living spirit. You shall not put the voice of the multitude, among whom you live, above the whisper of God's messenger in your heart.

When the Second Commandment was given, Idolatry, the worship of mere images, was a very different source of temptation from anything that we experience now, or from anything that St. Paul experienced. This is one of the matters in regard to which the past is past, and can never return. The impulse which led to idolatry is probably just what it was. For there is no evidence to justify us in concluding that human nature is in itself changed. But though human nature is not changed, society is. And every one born into the world now is brought under new influences, and grows up to manhood under quite different conditions. And the idolatry of ancient days is now impossible among civilized nations. Faint resemblances of it may be seen in abundance; every superstition is a sort of idolatry in the strict sense of the word; and even among Christians superstitions will sometimes grow to a most mischievous strength. But these, after all, are nothing in comparison with the idolatrous worship against which the Second Commandment was directed.

The issue of that idolatry is described in the most fearful language by St. Paul himself in the beginning of this Epistle to the Romans. Men changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things; wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts. Even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind to do those things which are not

convenient. In short, the result of that old idolatry was the indulgence of fleshly lust. And the language of the Apostle precisely describes the connection between the cause and the effect. They did not like to retain God in their knowledge. They had supplied to them ever by their conscience a higher ideal; not perhaps the highest, nor even in itself very high, but still higher than could be represented by their gross worship. They felt higher instincts, higher impulses. But they put the lower above the higher, and the end was the downright dominion of the lower nature.

All this in its gross, material form has passed away. But the essence of the temptation remains the same, and it is described in the Apostle's words, 'Being conformed to this world.' By being conformed to this world he plainly means the moulding of the life and character by the system which prevails around you, and not by the higher teaching which, through and above that system, reaches your heart and conscience. There is in the world the highest and truest teaching; for the world was made by God, and we can see His finger in every corner of it. But this teaching speaks to the conscience and the reason. The world has another voice which does not come from God at all, and which speaks to our weakness, to our folly, to our vanity, to our love of popularity, to our fear of offending. And this is the voice which we are now tempted to make our guide, and even to enthrone above our own consciences. We are not tempted to make the absurd

blunder of fancying that God can be confined in an image of wood or stone, or even that He can walk the earth in the form of some irrational animal. We are not tempted to put the material above the spiritual, or to degrade the glory of God by likening him to corruptible creatures. But we are tempted still to put the lower nature above the higher, and to look for the decision between right and wrong, not in the pages of the Bible, not in the warnings of conscience, but in the voice of the crowd.

The world, in fact, presents a convenient halfway-house between living by the right and surrendering to the wrong. To judge with the convenient laxity which the thoughtless verdict of the multitude will always urge, seems to give us all the freedom of undisciplined life without the pain of a wounded conscience. And yet this halfway-house is rarely more than a halfway-house. Those who begin with the world almost always end with the flesh, or sometimes with what is worse still. Men begin by talking lightly of serious faults because they are common, because they are not thought much of by careless men, because the temptations to them are great. And such men invariably, if they do not repent, go straight on, from mere laxity of judgment, to downright indulgence in fleshly sins. Indeed, so plain is the connection between conformity to the world and sins of this kind, that over-indulgent feeling in regard to these very sins is the prevailing fault of the judgment of ordinary society. And hence conformity to the world does the same kind of mischief now that idolatry did long ago.

It leads, by a very direct and rapid course, to a low moral standard, to stifling the higher nature, to a weak and perhaps a positively corrupt form of religion, and to a degradation of the life and character. I do not say that this is the invariable issue; but it is the tendency, and a tendency requiring to be jealously guarded against.

Now, in a place like this, there are few more constant temptations than the one that I have been describing. There will grow up, where so many are living together, a peculiar code of morals, not altogether wrong, and yet by no means altogether right. It does not represent precisely what any one deliberately thinks. It is, in fact, not the deliberate opinion of the majority, but only their common talk. And very often, if you could look into the inmost heart of one who was defending the wrong and scoffing at the right, you would find that even he had a better and truer judgment of what was right than he chose to tell. Some faults will be very decidedly condemned, no doubt. But there will be many that will not be condemned at all; and there will be very many, indeed, that will not be condemned at all as they ought to be. It is not to be expected that the young, who have had no experience of life, should be able to see all the bearings of wrong with the same clearness as their elders. In particular, no one at the age of school-life can at all fully enter into that deep horror of all fleshly sins which a grown man, if he be right-minded, is sure to learn. But making all these allowances, still it is quite undeniable that the code of right and

wrong, by which faults and characters are judged in such a society as ours, is very far from coinciding with the decrees of conscience or the rules of God's Word.

Here then is a very real temptation; namely, to put this voice of the multitude above the voice of conscience. And a dangerous temptation it is. It is a temptation to put the lower, which we know to be the lower, above the higher, which we know to be the higher. For remember this voice of the crowd is not the real opinion even of the crowd that utters it. If it were, it would deserve respect. But it is not. Those who are loudest in uttering it, only half believe it; many who join in uttering it, do not believe it all. Those who say of some serious fault, 'Oh, everybody does so; there is no great harm in it,' and the like, yet feel in their souls the sting of conscience reproving them for saying so. And when you follow the voice of the crowd against the voice of conscience, you are doing what the very crowd that applauds you secretly condemns, and sometimes even despises.

We must not be conformed to this world. Conformity to the world does not consist in joining in the pleasures with which God, who made the world, has filled it. It does not consist in pursuing the occupations by which the work of the world is done. It does not consist in allowing proper play to the natural impulses, which make us all delight in success, in distinction, in victory. All these things, though they can be made worldly, yet are not worldly in themselves. But it is conformity to the world to lower

your heart, your character, your life, to the model which may command the favour of the crowd that happens to surround you.

Against this conformity you will have to fight. And that not only in deeds, but in words also. It is your duty not only not to do wrong when the crowd encourages you to do so; but quite as much not to give wrong judgments, and call things by soft names, because it is the fashion to call them by soft names. There are no doubt many occasions when you ought not to give any judgment at all; when it would be stepping out of your place to condemn others, or disagree with them. But under such circumstances, can it be right to echo wrong sentiments uttered by others, or to utter them yourself? Even though your conscience knows better at the time, such outer conformity tends rapidly towards inner conformity, and your very conscience may become blinded at last. I do not call upon you always to be differing from the general judgment. On the contrary, the general judgment is often right. But I call upon you not to submit your own conscience to what you can see is merely the talk of those about you. You can find higher teaching if you will. You can find higher teaching even in the midst of that very crowd that threatens to mislead you; and you must not put the lower above the higher, at the peril of doing harm to your own character, and even to your own conscience.

There will be, there must be, great evils every now and then among so many brought together from such

different associations, such different homes, such different previous teaching. But whether such evils shall do deadly harm to all of us depends on this, whether we are doing our best to submit ourselves to the best influences in the place or to the easiest influences. The best influences, those to which our conscience attracts us, are sure to be full of the power of God; and even if they be not all that we could wish, yet assuredly they can be a great help. But the easiest influences, those that give the least trial to our moral courage, to our perseverance, to our self-control, will inevitably be lowering, and savour of the world. And the young Christian should ever bear in mind that he has within him a power and a vision which is far above the mere judgment of the multitude, and by it he must mould his soul.

SERMON XXXIII.

ILL TEMPER.

EPHESIANS iv. 31.

'Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil-speaking, be put away from you, with all malice.'

THE sins to which we are most liable fall into three different classes, and are exposed to three different kinds of condemnation from our natural conscience. The type of the one class is lying, which falls under the condemnation of contempt. This sin is the most cowardly, the weakest, the most unmanly of all sins. And so I say it is the type of the cowardly and unmanly sins. And all these sins, lying at the head of them, we regard, and cannot but regard, with contempt. And if we fall into them ourselves, our conscience compels us to despise ourselves. And this self-contempt continues till our souls can live above the sin; till we begin to feel not only sorrow for the past but determination for the future; till, in fact, we have separated ourselves from the sin altogether, and have become, and know that we have become, incapable of doing such things again. When we are able to say, 'I

once told a lie, and I am ashamed of having done so, but I know now that nothing would induce me to lie again;' then, and not till then, do we quite escape from the feeling of self-contempt. Lying, I say, is the chief and type of all these, but there are many others belonging to the same class. All that is in any way mean, petty, weak, cowardly, vain, belongs to the same class, and each in its degree merits the same contempt. Again, there is another class of sins which our consciences regard, not so much with contempt, as with horror, and disgust, and loathing. These are the sins of the flesh. Such sins not only degrade but brutalise. They put the animal nature altogether out of its place, making it govern the life and direct the whole soul. Such bodily indulgences may, of course, be very various in degree, and the condemnation that they meet with is also very various in degree. They may be sometimes very slight faults, but they can touch upon the most fearful sins of which our nature is capable. Bodily laziness, greediness, selfish love of comfort, excessive delight in permitted bodily enjoyments; and thence up to indecency and sins of which a Christian does not speak; these, I say, inspire us, some more some less, with disgust and loathing, and in their worst forms with horror. Last of all there is a third class of sins which are described in the text; sins which are not properly objects of contempt, nor yet of disgust, but rather of righteous indignation, the sins of the temper. These sins do not always lower a man and degrade him, as lying and such like sins

do. They do not corrupt him and poison his whole being, as sins of the flesh do. But they have a peculiar power of thwarting and injuring God's work in the world, and of giving pain to our fellow-creatures. They do not so immediately and directly hurt the character of the doer, but they hurt, more than any other, the right action of the Body of Christ. He who falls under the contempt of his conscience, and he who brings on him the disgust and horror of his conscience, does a terrible injury to his own soul. But his injury to his neighbour is not so immediate nor so sure to follow. Indirectly, these degrading and corrupting sins are the worst cankers that can possibly get into society. Any people thoroughly infected with them is hopelessly and irretrievably lost. But in each individual case the mischief is chiefly to the soul of the doer, and not to those among whom he lives. But the sins of the temper produce their worst results at once in our neighbour and not in ourselves.

It is for this reason that I would speak of such sins at this season.* Just because these sins of ill temper do not stain the soul with so black a mark at the moment as other sins, we are tempted to pass them over very lightly when we are judging of our own conduct. Self-contempt is a most terribly painful thing to bear; and if we have done anything to merit it, our conscience punishes us with a sting which will not easily be forgotten. The sense of

* Preached in Lent.

having poisoned and corrupted our nature; when we begin to feel it, is very awful; and if our conscience be awake, we are sure to be warned with the most solemn warnings against the sins of the flesh, and the depth of our feeling is sure to increase with increasing years, as we better understand the true relations of the soul and the body. But sins of the temper leave their most visible mark outside us and not inside us; and when the immediate temptation and our own heat or sullenness is gone, we are very apt to judge them too leniently. They do not immediately stain the character; they are consistent with a brave and strong will, with a pure heart and imagination, with much true generosity and unselfishness, with a high purpose, with much warmth and depth of religion. And we are very apt to repent of them very earnestly, and then forget them so completely as to be ready to fall into them again at the very next temptation.

Moreover, there is another reason why our consciences pass over such sins lightly, in comparison with their importance. They are punished and checked by society, and to the discipline of society the conscience accordingly abandons them. If they were quite unchecked, they would obviously make society quite impossible. If men are to be brought into any social relation at all, some sort of peace is the very first condition; and without *some* discipline of the temper, no peace is possible. The very commencement of all laws is the provision of some means of putting an end to quarrels, and to the acts which lead

to quarrels. And what civil society does by law and force, that is done in the ordinary intercourse of life by custom and public opinion. And so all the worst excesses of ill-temper are repressed, and there is a perpetual tendency to repress them still more. Of all the discipline that we get from the ordinary working of social intercourse, far the larger part consists in teaching us to keep the temper under some sort of control.

But it is quite obvious that this is not nearly enough for the Christian. The Christian will have to remember that one of the very first duties that he owes to his neighbour is the thorough subjugation of his own temper. This requirement appears again and again in the New Testament. There is hardly an Epistle in which it is not expressly enjoined. It is repeatedly commanded by our Lord. And it is implied even more often than it is expressly commanded.

For what is the chief burden of our Lord's teaching in regard to our duty to our neighbour? Is it not to promote his happiness? So prominent is this requirement above all other duties that we owe to man, and second only to those which we owe to God, that Christians are sometimes surprised to find so much more stress laid on our labouring for our neighbours' material than on our labouring for his spiritual good. Is it not a greater thing, it is often said, to convert a soul than to visit the sick, or to feed the hungry? How is it, then, that our Lord says so much more about the latter than about the former?

Obviously, for this reason, that the latter is much more put in our power than the former. God has put the happiness of our neighbour into our hands much more directly and completely than He has put their holiness. It is a greater thing to make a man holy than to make him happy, and you must never forget this. But remember also that you can do but very little to make him holy, for God has kept that chiefly in His own hands; but you can do much to make him happy, for God has put that a great deal into your hands. It is greater to convert a soul than to make a fellow-creature happy; but to the one you are called rarely, and to the other every day of your life.

And if this be one of our chief duties, most certainly there is nothing which so entirely runs counter to it, and makes it impossible, as an undisciplined temper. For of all things that are to be met with here on earth, there is nothing which can give such continual, such cutting, such useless pain. The touching and sensitive temper, which takes offence at a word; the irritable temper, which finds offence in everything whether intended or not; the violent temper, which breaks through all bounds of reason when once roused; the jealous or sullen temper, which wears a cloud on the face all day, and never utters a word of complaint; the discontented temper, brooding over its own wrongs; the severe temper, which always looks at the worst side of whatever is done; the wilful temper, which over-rides every scruple to gratify a whim,—what

an amount of pain have these caused in the hearts of men, if we could but sum up their results. How many a soul have they stirred to evil impulses; how many a prayer have they stifled; how many an emotion of true affection have they turned to bitterness. How hard they sometimes make all duties. How painful they make all daily life. How they kill the sweetest and warmest of domestic charities. The misery caused by other sins is often much deeper and much keener, more disastrous, more terrible to the sight; but the accumulated pain caused by ill temper must, I verily believe, if added together, outweigh all other pains that men have to bear from one another.

But further, the undisciplined temper is not merely mischievous because it gives pain, and very often, if not always, the wrong sort of pain. Although it does not stain the character like some other sinful states of the soul, yet it, too, is not free from that condemnation. In particular it makes prayer either impossible or half useless. Whether we know it or not, the prayer that comes from a heart indulging in evil temper is hardly a prayer at all. We cannot really be face to face with God; we cannot really approach God as a Father; we cannot really feel like children kneeling at His feet; we cannot really be simply affectionate and truthful in what we say to Him, if irritation, discontent, or gloom, or anger, is busy at our breasts. An undisciplined temper shuts out the face of God from us. We may see His holy Law but we cannot see Himself. We may think of Him as our Creator, our

Judge, our Ruler, but we cannot think of Him as our Father, nor approach Him with love.

And, lastly, this want of discipline makes it quite impossible that we should use the natural impulse from which ill temper springs in the way that God meant us to use it. For the impulse of anger was not given us for nothing. It, like all else within us, was given for a purpose in the service of God. So the Apostle bids us 'Be angry and sin not,' plainly implying that there are reasons which will justify anger, but such reasons will not justify our letting that anger degenerate into sin. There are reasons which justify anger. For instance, there is such a thing as anger with ourselves when we have fallen by what is no more than a momentary lapse from right. There are cases in which anger with ourselves, and indignant shame are better than soft sorrow. There are cases in which the highest and truest repentance will rather take the form of brief and stern self-reproof than self-abasement and humiliation. And these cases, when it is right to be angry with ourselves, will shew also when it is right to be angry with others; for sharp and stern dealing with wrong the moment you meet with it, is often the best and fittest way to deal with it. A very great deal of wrong doing is simply made worse by dwelling on it, by talking much about it, by lengthening out the punishment of it. Again, there is a great deal of wrong doing that is merely the consequence of the doer being morally half asleep, and not quite realising what he is about. And in such cases

very often nothing but the short and sharp dealings of anger will awake him. And there are natures habitually sluggish which cannot otherwise be stirred. We all have a tendency to shade off evil into good, and by so doing to weaken our sense of the distinction between them; and anger is very often the best means of cutting the line broad and deep once more, and stamping with reprobation that which deserves reproof. But such a use of anger as this, plainly implies that the temper shall be under the absolute control of the conscience. How can that anger be employed as the servant of God and of the awful law of right, which the next moment we use as the servant of our own jealousy, or pride, or irritability? How can that anger be used to bring men to a sense of right which is itself not subject to that sense of right? How can that anger be used to uplift the soul above what is mean, or earthly, or weak, which is itself the slave of personal feeling? Righteous anger is the servant of the Law of God. Then only will it serve God when it bears on its very face that it is itself absolutely subject to the will of God. You may perhaps be justified in resisting your neighbour, and in resisting him with anger; but certainly not unless your anger is rigidly just and absolutely self-controlled.

Now ask whether this is at all like the anger that we commonly mean when we speak of undisciplined temper? Could this sort of anger be sullen, or irritable, or gloomy, or passionate? Could this anger utter cutting words, or take offence at trifles? Could this anger be selfish or

proud? Is this the temper which would rebel against reproof? Is this the unsocial character that would always hold itself aloof from the pleasure of others, and contribute nothing to the general happiness? No two characters can be more opposed than his whose zeal for the service of God sometimes stirs him to brief anger or indignation, and his who indulges his temper because he does not choose to control it.

Finally, let me warn you that ill temper is a sin requiring long and careful discipline. You cannot get it into order at once. Long after you have seen the duty of controlling it, you will find your control of it very imperfect. God gives some victories speedily: this victory He rarely gives till after many battles. Look well, then, how you stand with such an enemy, and for the sake of Christ, and for the sake of all whom you love on earth, learn to subdue what Christ condemns so often, and what gives others so much pain.

SERMON XXXIV.

THE THREE CROSSES.

Preached on Good Friday.

ST. LUKE xxiii. 33.

'*And when they were come to the place, which is called Calvary, there they crucified Him, and the malefactors; one on the right hand, and the other on the left.*'

It has been said with some truth, that besides its own proper and most awful meaning, the scene which this day once beheld upon Mount Calvary, was a type of God's sure judgment on the whole world. On that mountain, on this day, there stood three crosses; one of these was the Cross of Holiness, which has to be borne by the righteous for the sake of the wicked; another was the Cross of Penitence, the only gate left open by which men, such as we are, can ever enter Paradise; the third was the Cross of Condemnation, of that terrible doom which punishes but does not soften, which chastens but does not mend. One of these three was laid on all men; all men without exception; all men even including Him Who shared our nature, but did not share our sin. Sin brought pain into the world.

And from this pain none can escape; not even He Who did not sin. In taking our nature upon him, He took with it the burden that is fastened to it; and that misery which comes on us, because we are sinners, He had to bear because He was a man. From the Cross, in some form or other, could no man be free; not even He. And so since He could not bear the cross of His own sins He bore the cross of other men's. A faint shadow, a resemblance, an echo, of that pain is felt by all those whose hearts are pierced by the sins of those whom they love. The grief which a father feels over the misconduct of a son, the pang of a mother when her child has proved unworthy, these may give us some idea of the burden which He bore, upon Whom our Father in heaven laid the iniquity of us all. And as there is no human power which can so deeply touch the soul of a sinner as the sorrow which his sin has brought on a loved and loving heart, so we may recognise in this sorrow the human counterpart of that His one Atonement, which heals all the sons of men and brings them back to God. Just as a man can often do more by his sorrow than by his anger, so the Cross of Christ has reached many whom the terrors of judgment could never have reached, has brought them home like Prodigal sons returning to a Father; has brought them to repentance instead of remorse, and to loving submission instead of despair. The Cross of Christ is indeed the one unapproachable source of all spiritual healing; but yet the Cross, like all else in the economy

of God's government, does not stand alone, but has its types and shadows, its copies and counterparts, scattered through God's works; and these, while they are resemblances of its character, are also channels of its power. The saints whom God hath sent, and, as we know, will continue to send, for the edification of His Church, can do their appointed work chiefly by bearing the Cross which Christ once bore; the cross of living purely in a world of sin; of being just and true, and loving, in a world of iniquity, and falsehood, and hatred; of suffering, when need requires it, for the sake of truth: of sacrificing all else at the call of duty for the love of God; of caring, beyond all other things, for God's service and God's glory, and kindling, where they can, the same desire in the hearts of others. And even those who know full well that they have no title to be saints, yet, if they will be God's children at all, must expect to bear the same cross; must expect to give up their own will, even when innocent, for Christ's sake; must count on meeting with burdens and trials which do not seem to belong to them; must be ready not to complain, but rather to rejoice, that God thus gives them tokens of claiming them for His own. All Christians have, in their degree, to bear the Cross of Christ. But yet, when we think of those three crosses, we know that the Cross of Christ is not ours in the same sense or the same degree as the other crosses which stood by the side of it.

The true Cross of Holiness He and He alone could bear. Real as that Cross may be to us on occasions few

and widely separated, yet it vanishes altogether when we think of His. The true Cross of Holiness He alone could bear; but between the Cross of Penitence and the Cross of Condemnation, it is still ours to choose.

How many there are that choose the Cross of Condemnation! How many there are who, when God in His mercy inflicts some gentle chastisement, rebel against His hand, and bear all the pain without obtaining any of the blessing! The impenitent thief, you may be sure, did not now hang on that Cross for the first time. He had had, we well know, many a warning, many a sharp correction, before it came to that. He must have often felt the sharp chastisement with which the Providence of God surrounds such paths as his. But the punishment only hardened him in sin, and the very sight of the gates of the grave still left him as hard as ever. We think this awful when we see the end of it. But how lightly we pass it over as we meet with it in our own lives. God meets us at every turn with His Cross, which we may make at our own will either into the Cross of Condemnation or of Penitence, either into the chastisement of a loving Father or into the vengeance of an angry Master. God teaches our own sins to scourge us. The still small voice of conscience will not rest. The hours of darkness in the night haunt us with the memory of our own sinfulness. The results of our folly bring pain on us, disgrace, loss of friends, stern treatment from those set over us, unkindness from our companions, disappointment of some cherished hope, injury to our

health, sorrow in the faces of our parents. If we would but look at it, we could see that we suffered justly, receiving the due reward of our deeds. But how often is our heart defiant and discontented; angry at the punishment; questioning the justice; comparing our lot with that of others who seem more favoured; unsoftened; unsubdued; unresigned! The impenitent thief had not fewer means than his brother in guilt for learning the mercy and the love of God. He, too, must have seen the face, must have watched the bearing of the Holy One so close at hand. He, too, must have heard the prayer, 'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.' He must have seen the sorrow and love that shone forth from a countenance where love was ever reigning. He must have seen the unearthly presence, the calm, the self-forgetfulness. He must have heard the words, few but full of Heaven itself, which dropped from the Saviour's mouth. He must have felt their tones go through his soul. But neither his own pain nor the Redeemer's voice could soften his heart; and where love would not grow, hatred sprang up of itself; and he mocked One who promised to save and seemed unable to do it. It is awful to think of. And yet have we nothing like it? Have we never, when persisting in sin, and hardening ourselves in disobedience, and indulging a sulky defiance, found at our side a presence which spoke of the power of Heaven? Have no voices come to us from the Bible, from our Church, from our own hearts, nay, from Christ Himself, to tell us of the mercy of God? Have we never

seen in our fellow Christians a cheerful submission to the very duty which we hated, a cheerful acceptance of the very burden which we would fain throw off? And oh! has it not sometimes happened that when we were doing wrong, and others were doing right, we have been tempted to relieve any pain which came on ourselves, by adding as much as we could to the pain which came on them? Have we never, while hardening our own hearts to the lessons which our conscience gave us, endeavoured to harden the hearts of others, and joined in persecuting that which we would not follow?

In almost all the crosses that come on us, we have but this choice left, the choice of the reckless rebel, or the choice of the heart-stricken penitent.

The penitent thief stands before us as the type of all the penitents who have been taught by the lessons of suffering. He was, we may say, the first Christian; a Christian when no one else dared to be a Christian; a believer when no one else had the strength of soul required for belief. Consider this man's wonderful faith. All the disciples had fled, and though their loyalty to their Master remained, their faith in Him was altogether gone. They expected to see Him no more. Though they had once hoped that it should have been He that was to redeem Israel, they now hoped no more. The women still shewed their attachment; but these, too, shew no signs of having retained their faith. No support had the penitent thief from the sympathy of others; no help to his faith from the belief of others. Think how

hard it is to believe anything which all around you disbelieve; and how much harder then to believe what the whole world disbelieved, and to believe in spite of all the world, in spite of all that had happened to our Lord before his eyes, on the pure evidence of what he may have known of our Lord's history before, and of what he saw of his character now: to believe that the man who now hung in agony on the Cross close by, and sadly complained that God had forsaken Him, to believe that this was the very Lord of all creation, and could, at His will, take His followers into Paradise, this is an act of faith which the world never saw before and can never see again. This man, for the time that he hung there, was the whole Christian Church in himself. Others were just outside, to be admitted in a few days more, but at that hour none was within but he alone. The first, the pattern of all Christian penitents, he recognised his Saviour when no other eye could know Him, and underneath the sufferings which then crowned that sacred Hill he saw the Hand of God. In this penitence we cannot equal him, but we can follow. We can recognise in the Providence that guides our steps, and sometimes chastises our backslidings, the loving hand of a loving Father, whose correction is meant to open our eyes and shew us what Mount Calvary had to shew.

For this is the end of the Cross which is borne by us, to bring us to the knowledge of the Cross which was borne by Christ. The depth of the mystery of the Atonement who shall fathom? All that has been written

on the subject only leaves behind the sense of the wonder of the mystery, and every explanation that has been attempted is overthrown with an ease which warns us that explanation is impossible. Every statement of the doctrine which has ever yet been made always contains those self-contradictions, those manifest breaches of the plainest rules of logic which indicate that the human intellect is baffled. But what the head cannot compass the heart can feed on, and every act of repentance, every acknowledgment of God's mercy and love, every sense of our own helplessness, our own darkness, our own sin, brings us nearer to the power of the Cross of Christ. We cannot understand it, but we can be thrilled by it. We cannot say how or why we needed it, but we can feel our need of it. We cannot explain its strange power to help us, but we can walk by its help. We cannot tell all that it does for us, but we can drink in life from the thought of it. When we think of the Cross of Christ, and think who He was that bore it, we can draw from it the assurance of God's love; for if He gave us His own Son, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things: and the assurance of our own forgiveness; for God hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all: and the assurance of present help; for He is with us always, even to the end of the world: and the assurance of our own victory; for we can do all things through Christ that strengtheneth us: and the assurance of future blessedness; for He is gone to prepare a place for us, and we shall be ever with the Lord.

SERMON XXXV.

THE BURIAL OF THE PAST.

ROMANS vi. 11.

'Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord.'

LIFE, almost from the beginning to the end, is a series of fresh beginnings. We not only have to take the past as a starting-point for the future; we have, in a certain sense, to be perpetually going back and undoing the past, and commencing once more afresh. We cannot really undo the past, in spite of all our longing; we cannot undo either our acts or the consequences that have followed from them. But still we have to do as much towards it as we can. Nothing is more natural than to say to ourselves, 'Let me begin again; all this has been a very foolish mistake; it has brought a great deal more pain than pleasure; it has never given the satisfaction that it promised; it has caused me a great deal of unhappiness; it has turned out quite unlike what I meant; or rather, I had not much meaning in what I did, and, now that I see what I have been doing, I am very sorry that I took

the turn I did; let me begin again.' The beginning again is made impossible by the indelible character of what we have done. We could not put everything else back again, even if we could put ourselves, and we cannot put ourselves. Besides the reputation, good or evil, as it may be, that we have acquired in the eyes of our neighbours and acquaintance, there is the memory of our past life, capriciously fastening on this detail or that; but however capricious, always retaining enough to make going back quite impossible. If we could but wipe out the past both from the memory of other men and from our own, and retain the experience that we have gained without the pain and the sin through which we gained it, that would, as it seems, wholly satisfy our need, and we could really commence afresh. We do not quite ask to be put on the same level as we might have reached if we had been more careful, more in earnest. The ideal state of the soul would no doubt be never to do wrong at all; not to grow in the fitful, losing, dangerous way, but steadily upward from grace to grace till our day of departure came. But as we have missed, very much missed, this ideal growth, we do not ask to have that done for us which we know ought to have been done in us: we do not ask to have the prize of victory without the struggle. What we ask for, is to be enabled to fight the next battle without the burden of the past hanging like a weight about our necks, clinging like a chain about our arms. We want to feel that we have not lost our self-respect, or the respect of

our fellows. We want to get out of past defeats, not the hindrance of a cowed and craven spirit, but the aid of a clearer experience, and a better knowledge of our danger. We want, in short, to bury a great deal of the past; to bury it out of sight, and not have its presence haunt us any more. We wish to reckon a great deal of the past as so completely past as to belong to another life, from which we are separated by as broad a gulf as that which divides the dead from the living.

To this need, which no man ever lived without sometimes feeling, Easter Day is the answer. You are at full liberty to do all you ask. Bury the dead past by all means. Let not the memory of sin haunt you with any such daunting terrors or shames. Let not your heart sink down in self-contempt, and despair of itself, and of God, and of the love of God. Let not the shame which sin always leaves behind it be of the kind which hides away and joins the company of sin and of sinners, because of its own unworthiness. Let not the weakness of nature persuade you to be contented with a lower standard than you had once hoped to reach. Bury the dead past with all its sins; on this one condition, that you are 'alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord.'

If you can draw from the past the lessons of the past; if you can learn from it your temptations, your weak points, your besetting sins; if you can gather out of it that which came from God, and that which you can use in the service of God,—then, by all means, bury the rest.

The memory of the past sometimes mocks our repentance by pointing secretly to some irrevocable deed which we can do nothing whatever to mend; sometimes it calls forth the smiles or even the scoffs of foolish companions, who laugh at our repentance, and at the presumption of our setting up for righteous who have been perhaps in the front ranks of evil; sometimes it talks of the uselessness of renewing efforts so often defeated; sometimes it simply dogs us with the restlessness created by old habit, and drags us back into sin for want of something else to fill a vacant hour. And if we try to forget it, we are mocked by the recollection that what is past cannot be undone, and will follow us through all our life. Whether this be some one or two deeds of evil standing out from the rest of our life, and marring it with an indelible stain, or whether our whole course has been so bad, so careless, or so silly, that we can see no encouragement in all of it to make a change, still we must deal with it in the same way. Bury it as dead, and defy its power; and live in the power of the Son of God.

Bury past sins with a resolute will; knowing that they are still there though buried; knowing that they can yet rise from the grave; knowing that, at the Judgment-day, they will rise again when you do; knowing that the eternal records have noted them all down; knowing all this, bury them still and live henceforth unto Christ. It is true that every deed that we do passes into the substance of our being, and we can never be after it what we

were before it. But for all that, the sins that we have committed must not be allowed to work upon us beyond the measure that God has assigned to them. You have sinned, and you cannot be what you were, nor what you might have been. But you still can be a servant of God, and even your past sins can become in His hands instruments of His will. The fall of David gave us the thirty-second Psalm; the fall of St. Peter fitted him to strengthen his brethren. The weakness of St. Paul taught us the lesson, 'My grace is sufficient for thee; for My strength is made perfect in weakness.' These men, no doubt, would have done still more if they had had neither falls nor weaknesses; but as it was, even falls and weaknesses were of use in their service. There is even in evil a good element; for no evil in this world so entirely destroys the inherent goodness of all God's creations as not to leave a germ of good behind. And so out of sin shall we draw strength; and when we have drawn out all that may help us for the future, we need not fear to bury all the rest. Christ has expressly taken all that on Himself. We need not enquire how. Enough for us that we have, in the death and resurrection of Christ, the certain assurance that they who live unto Him need fear no condemnation.

Not with the past is our chief business, but with the present and the future. Let me then give a few cautions to those who really desire to reckon themselves to be dead unto past sins, but alive unto God and to Christ their Saviour.

It is not at all uncommon to find that a high festival like Easter, with all its associations and memories, shakes us free all at once from much sin, and gives us a sense of recovered freedom, and a sort of confidence, not a boasting, yet perhaps hardly a safe, confidence in our strength to win the battle. And then this excitement wears off in a day or two, and we are not only back where we were before, but have the additional weakness caused by an additional defeat.

Now, the first caution that I would give the soldiers of Christ at such a time is to beware of confounding a slight repulse with a regular defeat, and of allowing your enemy to win, not because you are really beaten, but because you fancy yourself beaten before you really are. A temptation comes to you in the shape of an evil thought. You hardly know whether the thought is really yours, or whether it came of itself. But at any rate an evil thought, though always distressing, and always in its nature kindred to sin, is not necessarily sinful. Do not immediately yield, as if the evil thought were as bad as the evil word or deed. As soon as your conscience awakes you, endeavour to cast out the foe, and let him not drive you to sinful actions because he has sullied your passing fancies. Or, again, if you have actually given way, and have allowed evil thoughts to dwell in your mind till there can be no doubt that they are really your own, do not say that this is just as bad as complete defeat, and that you may as well commit much sin as little. Fight every inch of

ground within your heart. However much you may be defeated, the mere fact of your having kept up the battle retains you on Christ's side and ensures you His help. Above all, strive, strive to the uttermost, not to let your sin come to actual outer deed. As far as the sinfulness of the will is concerned, thoughts and imaginations are very often quite as bad as deeds. But in their reaction on the doer, deeds have a power of mischief which nothing else has. The outward and visible act of sin is a sort of devil's sacrament which seals the evil and makes it real. Thoughts come and go, and evil that has simply passed through the thoughts, though it may be very terrible in itself, yet will sometimes pass away and leave the soul unweakened for the fight. But deeds leave a sting behind them. Many temptations will wear out of themselves if you can but prevent them from coming into outward shape: but if they ever lead you to outward acts they will cling round you for years.

And I am not speaking only of new temptations. Old temptations which have already led to evil deeds or words, to deeds or words of disobedience, of uncleanness, of selfishness, of ill temper, of hatred; when these temptations return, as return they will, learn to cut them off by not letting them ever mount up to deeds again. Whilst the temptation is assailing you within, whatever advantage it may gain over you, you will still have the sense of standing. But let the deed of evil be done, and you will feel prostrate under the enemy's feet.

Again, in recommencing the battle with sin, despise not the day of small things. At such times as these we are particularly liable to the temptation of Naaman the Syrian. We want different trials, different battles, different demands on us from those that we get. Life to our foolish eyes seem not so earnest, not so solemn as we had thought it. We had been prepared for something extraordinary, and we find nothing that is not common-place. We are like soldiers who have been drilled for a pitched battle, and then find nothing but a war of outposts, and so become discontented and careless. We cannot believe that life is so serious a thing as it really is, because it is not adorned with fine trappings, because it has lost the pomp and circumstance in which our imagination would wish to clothe it. Is all this preparation only to keep us from some trivial act of selfishness, from some hasty slip of the tongue, from some half an hour of idleness when we ought to have been at work? Yes, for the present it is. When more is wanted, more will be required. But the power of the Spirit of God is as much shewn in small things as in great. In objects of nature, no research that we can make into the minutest creatures of God detects the slightest appearance of a want of finish. The microscope proves that God's Hand will fashion the wing of an insect, which our eyes never could see at all without help, as carefully and as finely as the grandest and most complicated animal structure. So, too, is it in the spiritual world; and the Creator would have the slightest impulse

of the will as perfect and as pure as the deliberate choice of the reason.

Lastly, be not content with negatives. Do not only resist temptation, but seek to serve God. Seek to serve Him by diligent discharge of duties, by kindness to your fellow-Christians, by turning your thoughts occasionally, and not unfrequently, to your Father in Heaven, to the Cross of your Redeemer. And I put the first of these first, though the last is the most important, because it is with the first, the outer duties, that we always have to begin. Begin with such duties, for those you are justified in even forcing yourself to do, and however much your inclination may lead you another way, still these duties are to be done. I cannot, in the same sense, bid you force yourself to love God and Christ; but God will most assuredly give you at last, if not at once, the power of loving Him if you are doing your best to obey Him, and when thoughts of Him and of Christ enter your heart, do not turn away.

THE END.

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